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ABSTRACT

"A Feel for Books" is a book discussion series held for adult developing readers and their teachers and tutors. Students from various literacy programs serve as hosts for the five or six sessions held yearly, and project staff and tutors serve as facilitators. This resource book describes program activities and contains selected stories and facilitator questions to promote discussion. The discussion of program development begins with considering issues related to assessing needs and providing general planning advice. Facilitating the discussion session and evaluating it also are discussed. The eight selected stories are complemented by an outline and questions for facilitators. Appendixes contain sample publicity fliers, a reading survey form, an evaluation sheet, some articles from the "D.C. Literacy Newsletter," and a glossary of literary terms. (Contains 28 references.) (SLD)

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A Feel for Books

Book Discussions for Adult Developing Readers: A Resource Manual

Adult Basic Education Office
District of Columbia Public Library

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A Feel for Books

Book Discussions for Adult Developing Readers: A Resource Manual

Adult Basic Education Office
District of Columbia Public Library

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A Feel for Books, Book Discussions for Adult Developing Readers: A Resource Manual
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Introduction

Since March of 1991, the Adult Basic Education Office of the D.C. Public Library has sponsored *A Feel for Books*, a book discussion series for adult developing readers. As participation in and enthusiasm for the series has grown, the ABE Office staff has continued to work with adult developing readers and city literacy providers to refine, improve and expand the series. The success of this project over the past two years has proved to us that the adult learner participants and their teachers are truly enjoying the reading and sharing of common texts and benefitting from the spirited discussions.

During the past two years we have been informally documenting and evaluating the discussion sessions. Since feedback has been generally positive and enthusiastic and we have learned a lot from our successes and mistakes, we wanted to share our experience so that other libraries and adult literacy programs might consider starting or expanding book discussions for adult developing readers.

Fortunately, a 1992 LSCA (Library Services and Construction Act) Title 6 Grant provided the D.C. Public Library funding to develop and publish this resource guide. Additional, indirect support for this manual came through a National Institute for Literacy grant. That grant has enabled us to look more closely at the effect of participation in *A Feel for Books* on adult learners and their teachers and to benefit from the insights, observations and questions of the researcher on this project.

Although we have written this resource guide from the perspective of a sponsoring library, we hope that literacy providers and teachers will find it a helpful resource. We welcome suggestions, comments and feedback on its usefulness. Please direct comments to:

Adult Basic Education Office
D. C. Public Library
901 G Street NW, Room 426
Washington, D.C. 20001

Telephone (202) 727-1616

Acknowledgements

Many adult learners and their teachers and tutors have contributed to making *A Feel for Books* a valuable and enjoyable experience for the adult literacy community in the District of Columbia. However, special thanks are due to the following teachers, adult developing readers, librarians and ABE staff members for their contribution to the format, contents and or organization of this manual:

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We are also indebted to Mollie Burney, a former adult learner at Push Literacy Action Now in Washington, D.C. who gave *A Feel for Books* its name (see p. 5), served as the student host for the 1991 pilot project, and was an enthusiastic supporter from the very start.

Last we owe a debt of gratitude to the Vermont Reading Project, a collaborative effort of the Vermont State Library, Central Vermont Adult Basic Education and the Vermont Council on the Humanities. During a visit I made to Vermont in 1987, people from these organizations — particularly Mary Leahy from Central Vermont Adult Basic Education — graciously shared information on their book discussion series for adult learners and led me to envision a similar series for adult developing readers in Washington, D.C.

Marcia Harrington
Director, Adult Basic Education Office
District of Columbia Public Library

1/ What is *A Feel for Books*?

Toward the end of the session the group read "Daybreak in Alabama," Langston Hughes' image of a new way of life dawning in Alabama — a time when black, white, yellow and red clay hands would touch each other with kindness. At the end of the poem, there was an audible moment of silence and then a "wow" from one of the students.

From the FFB discussion on
Langston Hughes, Poet of Harlem

A Feel for Books is a book discussion series for adult developing readers and their teachers and tutors. Five to six sessions are held yearly. A typical session lasts from one and a half to two hours, with both a morning and an evening section. Students from various literacy programs serve as hosts — welcoming the participants, introducing the facilitators, and concluding the session. Staff of the Adult Basic Education Office, adult literacy teachers and tutors, librarians, and other volunteers serve as discussion facilitators. An Advisory Committee, comprised of adult learners, teachers, and library staff, assists with planning and reviewing the discussion sessions as well as with book and story selection.

In April of 1988 a group of D.C. adult literacy teachers, adult learners, and librarians came together to discuss starting a book discussion program for adult literacy students. Interest in this project was strong since it would:

1) Strengthen the connection between city literacy providers and the Library;
2) Bring teachers and learners from different programs together;
3) Encourage reading and library use among undereducated adults and their families; and
4) Demonstrate that reading and discussing books are ways of illuminating and struggling with human concerns.

It would, also, help learners who spend a lot of time learning to read begin to "act like readers."

In late 1989 a proposal was submitted to the D.C. Community Humanities Council for a three-session book discussion series for adult developing readers. Titled *A Feel*

for Books by an adult learner, the proposed series using stipended scholars as discussion leaders was funded. This series focused on "Black Folk History and the Human Experience" and featured four books: *The People Could Fly* by Virginia Hamilton; *This Strange New Feeling* by Julius Lester; *The Hundred Penny Box* by Sharon Bell Mathis; and *To Hell with Dying* by Alice Walker. The Library gave these books to the adult learner participants — many of whom have few if any quality books of their own — believing that they would read and share these books with other family members.

This series, which took place in March, April and May of 1991, far exceeded expectations of the planners. Evaluations by the adult learners, teachers/tutors, and scholars who participated were mostly positive.

> *"The reading of literature was encouraged by making it fun and stimulating. It never seemed like an assignment or homework. Rather it was a special event that people looked forward to. Teachers and tutors were encouraged to use literacy in the classroom by being given stories and books both classic in style and easily readable.... New readers absolutely loved the quality of the books, were eager to own them and read them."*

The audience for each of the three book discussions (morning and evening sessions combined) ranged from 40 to 60 people. Since that initial three-month pilot, *A Feel for Books* has become firmly established as a regular literacy building activity for adult developing readers from various city literacy programs. Feedback from participants, both learners and teachers, identified several positive outcomes:

> *"For many students these discussions have been the first opportunity to share opinions with others publicly on something they have read."*

> *"It is the first time that any of them [my students] has discussed books with a group of peers, and they have loved it."*

> *"Your program has opened doors in their [students'] lives they would have never before imagined."*

We have also discovered that using teachers, library staff persons, storytellers and other volunteers as well as "scholars" as discussion facilitators can be an effective way of getting adult learners to express ideas and opinions and engage in spirited discussion.

2/ The Value of Book Discussions for Adult Developing Readers

> *"What is happening here tonight, this strengthening of literacy skills, Malcolm would feel is the most revolutionary thing of all. Malcolm always said that education is the primary tool of the revolution."*
>
> From the FFB discussion on
> *Malcolm X, Black and Proud*

For most adult developing readers, learning to read or read better is a long process, in part because the time many learners spend in an instructional setting is limited, as is actual time spent reading outside the instructional setting. It has been our observation that many adult literacy students seldom sit and read a book; many of them do not read or study books in class (they study phonics, job applications and textbook exercises instead), and many have never sat with friends and talked about a book they read and enjoyed or didn't enjoy. But they may want to read "real" books. They simply don't know where to start and they're not sure they are going to enjoy the experience. Additionally it seems that some, if not many, adult literacy teachers and tutors view reading and discussing books and stories as a waste of too-limited tutoring or teaching time, and others, like their students, don't quite know where to start or how to find books that are accessible and of high quality.

Many teachers and tutors in D.C. adult literacy programs have observed over time that many adult learners like the chance to talk and share their opinions and understandings. So when we started thinking about a book discussion series, we asked, what if this desire to talk and share just might be an incentive to read or read more, to examine books and stories, to think in more depth about what one reads and why? Many of us who teach, tutor and train love to read, and we've struggled with ways to challenge adult developing readers to read more and perhaps begin to enjoy it.

We started out with numerous and lofty goals for *A Feel for Books*. Now, after nearly three years, we have shortened the list and refined our goals. They are:

- To encourage reading and library use among adult developing readers and their families;

- To demonstrate to adult developing readers that books and stories

can illuminate human concerns, and that these adults can struggle with these concerns through reading and discussing;

- To provide adult developing readers with the opportunity to share their understandings and opinions and thereby enhance their communication skills and self-esteem; and

- To provide adult developing readers books and stories to add to their family library and to encourage them to reread these books and share them with their families.

We know we are accomplishing these goals through the feedback we get from teachers, learners and our advisory committee, through written evaluations, from evaluator observations, and by the growing numbers of learners who participate in these sessions and the evident enthusiasm of the participants.

One local program coordinator told us that after one of their adult learners attended a discussion session, he enthusiasticaly recruited eight additional students. Now learners want to catch up on readings they missed in past sessions.

> *"Our series is scheduled to end with this April session and not start up again until September," I said, "but we can add a June session if there is interest." All hands went up and voices piped up, "Yes."*

The success of our book discussions appears to confirm what research tells us about the contributions these kinds of activities make to learning:

"Piaget tells us that there are at least two critical ingredients in learning: (1) the experience; and, (2) the socializing of the experience. The potential for learning from an interaction with a text is fulfilled only when the reader has an opportunity to socialize that experience. Socialization can take many forms, from artistic expression to group discussion–all of which share the common goal of communicating personal understandings and reaction to others.

"While the facilitating effects on comprehension of such socializing activity have been demonstrated in many different ways and formats, for many teachers, these kinds of actions are seen as a luxury rather than a necessity. It is our contention that varied opportunities to socialize reading experiences should become a high priority concern in a program designed to improve reading comprehension."*

*"Comprehension Skills," by Frank Guszak and James V. Hoffman, from *Teaching Reading: Foundations and Strategies*, Second Ed. Pose Lamb & Richard Arnold, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, CA, 1980, p. 336.

3/ Getting Started – Assessing Needs

> *"Right now I watch TV to relax, I don't want to do that. I want to read a book at night. I want to get up and turn off that TV. That's why I think of this project as a feel for books. I want books to be what I turn to."*
>
> Mollie Burney

As with all projects, success begins with planning. It's important to look carefully at potential learner participants: ethnic/cultural background; urban or rural population; range of reading levels; learning experience (one-to-one, small groups, classes); range of ages; transportation needs. These factors will come into play, especially if you intend to bring together learners from various programs. For example, ethnic/cultural background will likely influence book and story selection; learners who've only worked in one-to-one tutorials might at first be more reluctant to speak than those used to working in groups.

If the proposed discussion series will draw participants from various programs, centers and/or sites, get a commitment from key staff and learners to help with planning and to participate at least for a pilot project. Teachers and tutors are critical in encouraging participation and attendance and in assisting with the reading of books and stories.

We first learned about book discussions for adult developing readers from staff at the Central Vermont Adult Basic Education program, and subsequently talked with staff at several Vermont libraries and read some of the Vermont Reading Project's documentation. What we heard and read convinced us that book discussions could be a meaningful activity for adult learners and possibly enhance their reading abilities.

Our next step was a meeting with key literacy providers in the city — staff and learners — at which we presented the idea of a pilot project. We asked for positive and negative reactions to the proposed book discussion and discussed possible themes, materials, selection and training of facilitators, evaluation, funding and publicity. By the end of the meeting, the participants had not only given us helpful information but had enthusiastically endorsed the pilot project.

Once we knew we had some strong support for a pilot project, we talked with some adult learners about what kinds of selections they might enjoy reading. The

concensus was that we should focus on books with African-American themes. With this in mind we designed a pilot project: three sessions which each featured three different books or sets of books which focused on "Black Folk History and the Human Experience." Since we needed funding in order to give the books to participants, we submitted a proposal to the D.C. Communties Humanities Council. The Humanities Council requires that its grant recipients involve scholars in their projects, that is, persons who have advanced degrees in the humanities; who teach, research or work in the humanities; or who are "nontraditional" humanities experts such as tribal elders. Therefore we proposed that for our project scholars would act as facilitators, leading the discussions and provide background materials on authors and related materials.

After the pilot project concluded, we made changes based on evaluations and observations and established an advisory committee. We've continued to see needs assessment as an ongoing part of evaluation and program planning.

In summary, if you are considering starting a book discussion series, we recommend the following:

- Talk with others who are doing or have done similar book discussion groups.
- Survey the prospective participants to determine their level of interest and what kind of readings interest them.
- If there is interest, get a commitment from potential participants.
- Plan a pilot project of limited time duration.
- Evaluate the pilot project and proceed accordingly.

4/ Selecting Books and Stories

> *One of the evening participants seemed to sum up the mood of all the participants when she said, "I want to take it all [the story], and just hold it in my heart."*
>
> From the FFB discussion on
> *Sarah, Plain & Tall*

Once again, it is important to know the community as well as to include learners, program staff, and interested volunteers in book and story selection. For example, we know that there is strong interest in our community in African-American themes, but we also know that our participants' tastes are growing more eclectic. They comment on the interesting mix of selections: adult and juvenile literature, fiction and nonfiction, classical and modern stories, tales told and tales written down. We have an advisory committee that meets quarterly to help with selecting materials as well as to discuss issues and perceptions that affect book and story selection. That committee includes learners, teachers and tutors and a children's librarian/storyteller. We strongly suggest including a children's librarian as part of the selection process since there are many easier-to-read children's books that work well with adult learners (e.g., *The People Could Fly, Wiley and the Hairy Man, The Hundred Penny Box, To Hell With Dying*). We periodically ask participants at the end of a discussion session to share with us the kinds of stories or books they would be interested in reading. We've included our most recent interest inventory in the appendixes.

The reading levels of our participants range from very basic to high school though the majority of participants seem to fall between the 4th and 7th reading levels. This means we try to select materials that are manageable for learners reading at these levels. We expect teachers and tutors to read to or read with the most basic level students. Occasionally we have taped stories to give to learners along with the books.

When it comes to selecting books and stories, we keep in mind the following questions:

- *How do the goals of the project affect the titles selection?*
  For example, one of our goals is to encourage participants to share books and stories with their families. This means that some of our selections need to appeal to children as well as adults.

- *Who will do the actual title selection?*
  Though we get input from our participants and advisory committee, it's more often of a general thematic nature. Our staff must then research and annotate specific titles from which the advisory committee can choose.

- *Do the selected titles have strong, discussable content (adult themes, character, issues, language, degree of abstraction)?*
  We want participants to feel some personal connection to the story: it has historical or emotional relevance; it says something about being human; it speaks to our particular community. Not all stories or books are good candidates for discussion: they are too bland, lack conflict or dramatic tension or fail to elicit much affective response.

The adult learners who helped with our 1991 pilot project concluded that they wanted to focus on African-American history and the human experience. Acting on their enthusiasm for this theme, the ABE staff and a children's librarian suggested possible titles. We read these books, did reading level anaylses on them, and then chose five titles which we thought would generate a lot of discussion and could be shared with family members, friends and fellow students.

Our first session featured two stories. One was the folktale "The People Could Fly" from *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* told by Virginia Hamilton. This story is a hauntingly beautiful tale accompanied by stunning illustrations. Its themes are freedom, black culture, pride and slavery. This folktale was coupled with a factual anecdote, "The Ibo Landing Story" from *Talk that Talk*, the theme of which is the transcending of oppression through sacrifice. Within it is a tribal song of freedom ("Oh, Freedom") which was later sung during the Civil Rights Movement.

These two selections generated strong emotion and connections to the African-American experience. Students related the themes of escape, freedom and hope to their own lives, and genuinally enjoyed discussing the ways people survive and the value of their heritage.

The selection for the second session was "A Christmas Love Story," from *This Strange New Feeling* by Julius Lester. This is the suspenseful story of the escape of two slaves, William and Ellen Craft, from Georgia. The discussion was animated, revolving around racial labels, the phenomena of "passing," illiteracy, creating historical fiction from fact and social differences between men and women.

The third and last readings, *The Hundred Penny Box* by Sharon Bell Mathis and

To Hell With Dying by Alice Walker, were more modern in time and explored the themes of intergenerational relationships, family history, aging and death.

One thread which tied all of these sessions together was that faith, self or group will, and love create a power which can transcend earthly problems. And that thread simply provided much food for reflection and discussion.

Over the past three years, we have had a rich mix of stories and books, mostly fiction with a dash of nonfiction in the form of letters. All the selections, however, have been manageable in length for adult developing readers; some have included strong characters and well-developed relationships; others have carried strong humanistic themes such as the quest for freedom and hope; and others have been tales of obstacles overcome and barriers surmounted — always popular with adult new readers who are leaping their own hurdles.

Despite our attempts to hold to the criteria above and reach concensus on readings, our story and book selection meetings can be filled with strong differences in point of view and disagreements over the appeal of certain stories. For example, at one recent meeting, a teacher asked why we would want to read the book *Rose Blanche* if the *enjoyment* of reading was one of our goals. *Rose Blanche* is the story of a young German girl and her relationship with imprisoned young children in Nazi Germany. Published as a picture book, its mood is somber and its conclusion tragic. We suggested that it be read with excerpts from *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl.* After a long discussion on the merits of balancing fiction with fact, serious/disturbing readings with lighter/hopeful ones and of the value of remembering and questioning why someone, the writer/illustrator, would want to put such a heavy story into a picture format, the group decided to schedule these selections. However, the committee strongly encouraged the library's ABE staff to suggest concrete ways for teachers and tutors to prepare their learners for these readings.

5/ Training Facilitators

". . . imagine being a slave. How would you act and feel?"
Hands waved in the air, and everyone spoke at once.
"We are all slaves to our children."
"You can never look your master in the eye,"
"You are in bondage."
The facilitator said, "Relate stories to your own life. It's not enough to read a story, say 'that was nice,' and put it down."

From the FFB discussion on
"The People Could Fly"

A key component in any book discussion is an effective facilitator, and a facilitator who leads a discussion for adult developing readers needs some special understanding of this group as well as some particular techniques. We had mixed results using scholars as facilitators during our 1991 pilot project. Two of the four scholars were gifted storytellers and understood the difference between lecturing/ teaching and facilitating. The other two scholars, used to working with groups of fluent readers, overwhelmed the participants with information and questions and assumed that the participants understood literary terms. This happened despite the training we did with the scholars.

After the pilot project, the ABE staff at the D.C. Public Library took over the role of facilitating and began to recruit literacy teachers, tutors and library staff persons. We believed that persons who had some experience with adult developing readers would have a better feel for the dynamics of the group. That has proved true, but we still believe that training is important, whether facilitators are volunteers or scholars, since facilitating a group book discussion is new even to some adult literacy teachers and tutors. Training sessions also give both new and experienced facilitators the chance to exchange ideas, pose their questions and share their experiences.

To date, we have held two training sessions. Based on the evaluation of our first session, we discovered that training needed to include specific techniques on questioning, and that facilitating was best done, at least for the first time, in teams of twos. We recommend at least a three-hour block of training time with a built-in break. Ideally, any new facilitator will have observed or participated in a past session.

And, because a number of adult learners are now experienced and enthusiastic participants, we want in the coming year to give them the chance to co-facilitate ses-

sions — to use and expand their communication skills. This will challenge us to re-evaluate and perhaps modify our training process.

We are still experimenting with our facilitator training, but share here the outline for our May 1993 session which seemed to work well and to be enjoyable for trainees and trainers.

A Feel for Books – Facilitator Training Outline

1. **Introductions**

   Divide trainees into pairs. Give one of the pair the following assignment which the other is not to see:

   > *"For the next five minutes, see how long you can keep your partner talking without having to do anything except ask questions. If you have to answer a question, then get into an answer mode and see how long your partner can keep you answering questions."*

2. **Purpose of the workshop and benefits for trainees**

   Display the "purpose" and "benefits," below, on a sheet of chart paper. Then go through each point, seeking participant input on how they will benefit from their volunteer experience as trained FFB facilitators.

   Purpose:

   - To give you information and techniques to get you started as a FFB facilitator

   Benefits:

   - Increase your repertoire of techniques
   - Gain or review knowledge of differences between teaching and facilitating
   - Review the dynamics of working with groups and gain a better understanding of that process
   - Gain or review knowledge of "questioning"
   - Understand the product vs. process model

3. **Who are the participants?**

   Solicit responses from the group:

   - Adult developing readers: range from basic to fairly advanced (GED)
   - Persons with a lot of life experience which must be acknowledged
   - Persons who do not have much understanding of literary terms or structures

- Some persons who do not have broad vocabularies
- Some persons with limited experience working in a group
- Persons with varying degrees of comfort speaking up in a group

4. Preparing to facilitate

Ask participants why questions are so important to a good discussion. Using the "Kinds of Questions" handout (see page 25), have each participant, pairs or the group as a whole present the definition and purpose of each kind of question as well as their questions and additional thoughts:

a. Closed-Ended
b. Open-Ended
c. Overhead (open or closed)
d. Direct (open or closed)
e. Relay
f. Return

Cover these points in your discussion of questioning and timing:

- The importance of silence for thinking followed by a response or the facilitator rephrasing of question and resoliciting a response; use body language that shows you are willing to wait for participants to form their responses.
- All responses are acceptable and should not be dismissed or negated. It is up to the facilitator to direct the discussion from incorrect answers or off-track responses. Use questions to keep the discussion focused and on track:

  Does anyone feel differently? Why?
  Does anyone want to challenge that opinion?
  Can anyone add to that point/tell us more about that?
  What personal experiences have you had that illustrate that?
- Plan ahead for how you will close the session. Summary questions can work well:

  Can everyone give one word for how they feel about this story?
  Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why?
  What did you learn from this story?

5. General Tips

As a group, brainstorm on what works. See "Facilitator Tip Sheet" on page 17 and try to include the points below:

- Focus on content and meaning and probe for values and meaning.
  Why did Hollis not want to give Blandford her photo?
  Why would you want to be part of that family?
  Do you believe the old woman really met Jesus on the road? Why?
  Could you help us better understand what you mean/think/feel?
  How did you arrive at that opinion about _____ ?
  Is there something more to your opinion that you haven't shared?
- Personalize and get to meanings by drawing on learners' experiences; point out real-life examples.
- Stay open; you can't predict others' associations and experiences.
- Go with the unexpected; show your respect.
- Challenge ideas but not someone personally.
- Remember that your ideas, as facilitator, are not gold.
- The facilitator's body language is important. A facilitator who uses eye contact and movement gives the group energy; a facilitator whose voice is monotone, who looks down and who sits passively can lose the group.
- The fervor of learning is a positive force that gives energy to the discussion; it can also lead the discussion off track. The facilitator must harness this energy to keep the conversation focused.
- Get to the labels through illustrations/examples:
  The name for what happens is the plot.
  That kind of comparison is called a simile.
- Make eye contact with everyone early on, both speakers and non-responders; maintain eye contact.
- Pay attention to non-verbal signals.
- Over-prepare; failing to prepare is to prepare to fail.
- Use and respond to humor when appropriate.
- Think about ways to get everyone to participate.

5. Facilitating the Session: Practice

Assign pairs to develop questions around one concept in a particular short selection. Have participants read the selection and then have each pair spend about 10 minutes facilitating. Afterwards, discuss what happened. Ask:

How did you feel about this experience related to your purpose?
What did you focus on?
What do you think is important to incorporate in your planning?

6. Commitment and next session(s)

Have everyone commit to some form of future participation: either observing the next session, facilitating or co-facilitating. Provide a schedule of the book discussion sessions.

7. Evaluation

Either prepare a written evaluation form and have participants fill it out, or ask participants to state their responses to particular questions:

What was most helpful and least helpful about this training session?

Do you now feel comfortable about co-facilitating?

Also, trainers should take time after this session to reflect on the experience and to use any observations to plan for future training sessions.

The following "Facilitator Tip Sheet" is one of several handouts we give to trainees. The others include "Kinds of Questions" (page 25), a list of past readings we've discussed, and a duplicated copy, if appropriate, of the story used in the training.

Facilitator Tip Sheet

For many participants, *A Feel for Books* has been or will be their first opportunity to read a book and discuss it with their peers. Some students may not have worked in a group before. To make this experience exciting but non-threatening and as rewarding as possible, here are some points for a facilitator to keep in mind.

Why do we need a facilitator? Why don't we just sit and talk about whether or not we like this book?

A facilitator is key to a meaningful discussion. He or she keeps the discussion focused and moving along. Since she or he has read and studied the story and has prepared questions, the facilitator ensures that all participants will be engaged at some level in the discussion. A facilitator's enthusiasm and careful preparation are an indication that she or he has taken the experiences, opinions, and thoughts of adult developing readers seriously. The facilitator demonstrates that human concerns can be illuminated and struggled with through hearing, reading and discussing books and stories.

A facilitator is responsible for reviewing materials, becoming familiar with the author's background if appropriate and with the historical context and any other pertinent information. A facilitator should try to discuss the text on three levels: content and language, personal feelings towards the stories, and linking of the text to universal themes. By identifying themes and preparing questions for discussion and by bringing in additional materials to enhance the stories (maps, videos, pictures, music, recordings and other books and items), a facilitator helps to make the tales read or told come alive.

What else should a facilitator keep in mind?

- This is more than a book "club." It is first a learning experience which focuses on collaboration, communication and critical thinking skills. A facilitator should keep the goal of shared learning in mind even if a bit of "teaching" is occasionally called for.

- Everyone is equal. Tutors, teachers, students and librarians will join in the discussion, but a facilitator does not need to differentiate between participants. This helps learners know that everyone is really participating at the same level.

- If a facilitator needs to refer to the text, she or he should leave plenty of time for students to find the pages and line(s) referred to. Expect learners to give more sophisticated answers on philosophical and emotional questions than on text detail.

- Be attentive to hesitant or subdued attempts to take part in discussion and encourage more quiet and shy participants. Watch the audience closely, and call for additional responses frequently to make sure no one has been overlooked.

- Don't let any one participant dominate. Some participants may stray from the topic at hand, but don't let them get too far off the track for too long.

- Add personal touches when possible. These can be concrete (e.g., a historical or cultural item, an article of clothing, a picture or map, a special visitor) or intangible (an anecdote). If you have an "ice-breaker" exercise, that's fine, too.

- There is usually a lot of material to cover in each session. Do not worry if only a portion of a book or one story out of two is covered in any detail. Everything is flexible. After all, learners are welcome to continue the discussions on their own.

- Use different kinds of questions: Factual, inferential, evaluative, simple, sophisticated, etc. (See "Kinds of Questions" on page 25 for more specific information on questioning.) Consider word exercises or short statements as a way of summing up the main theme of a book or giving an opinion:

  A student stated that To Hell With Dying *was about love and faith, and* The Hundred Penny Box *was about love and the mother's selfishness. In that one sentence she really summed up a lot.*

  What is your Tar Beach (place of escape and dreaming)?

  Which story did you like best and why?

  Give one word that expresses your opinion of the story.

- There are no wrong answers. Make sure that no one looks stupid or feels isolated and that all comments are validated even if someone is off the topic. As facilitator, draw out and clarifies the values participants associate with the story.

- Don't allow the group to anoint the facilitator the dominator. The facilitator is a questioner, a clarifier, a suggester, and an enhancer. Thorough preparation as well as giving thought to process will help the facilitator keep throwing the ball back to the group.

Keeping in mind the above, here's what we hope happens:

- The readers connect the author to the story. They find out about her or his personality and connect it to the magic of the book or story.

- The readers feel they know the book at a new level. They understand something new; they've learned something; they see something more in the story.

- The group feels comradeship and knows that the facilitator has also enjoyed herself or himself.

- They feel like discussing the books or stories more; they keep discussing as they walk out the door.

- A breakthrough occurs. This is unpredictable, but it happens. One past participant shared that she now needed to deal with her grief after reading *Dear Bill*, a letter to a deceased Vietnam vet. A young father shared that *Wiley and the Hairy Man* was the first book he had ever read to his daughter, and she asked him to read it again. The group broke out in applause!

- Each person has communicated at least one feeling, opinion, or idea.

- Students begin to understand the levels that exist in literature. They realize that reading is not reading instruction. Reading is bringing meaning to and getting meaning from a text. It's about thinking and sharing.

6/ Facilitating the Session

The story was "The People Could Fly." "Of course," the facilitator said, "people cannot really fly. Just like animals in folktales cannot really talk."

A woman from Sierra Leone interruputed politely. "There are people in my country who live deep in the jungle," she said. "It's a secret power; these people are considered witches. They can also turn into different things and talk to lions."

The facilitator smiled with delight. "Well, live and learn," she said.

From the FFB discussion on
"The People Could Fly"

Since we decide on our upcoming year's readings in the summer, facilitators do not need to choose selections. They do volunteer, however, to facilitate particular discussion sessions, and they are responsible for reading the text, thinking about it, doing any background research and preparing the questions for the session. We encourage facilitators to work in teams of two if possible, and staff is available to help if necessary.

Reading and thinking come first. As facilitators read and think about the story or stories, they should be noting their impressions and reactions. These in turn can be turned into questions:

Who are the characters? What do they think? How do they behave? What are the choices presented to the main characters? How do they relate to other characters? What's the setting (time and place)? What are the themes? Is the language noteworthy? Are there any sections that lend themselves to being read aloud? Why? Is a particular viewpoint expressed? Does the story/book express certain values or carry a message? Are there words or terms that will need explanation or definition? Is there anything special about this story? Was the ending a surprise? How will adult learners relate to the story? How does the story relate to life in the here and now? Did you like the story? Why or why not?

Develop questions based on the reading and thinking and discussion with the co-facilitator. Facilitators should write these down and organize them if appropriate. Use informal language and check to make sure that questions cover the entire story or

book, not just one part, one character or one theme.

How many questions are necessary? We've tended to have a list of about 20 questions for two readings or 10 for each of two readings. However, facilitators should probably over-prepare especially if they are new and don't tend to think fast on their feet. Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no unless these kinds of questions are really needed to draw in very silent participants or to pick up the pace. Facilitators should keep in mind that they and their questions are to keep participants involved and the discussion moving. Questions do not have to exhaust all the details in the story.

Facilitators need to give particular thought to how they will open the session and the discussion. We have student hosts who open the session by welcoming participants and asking them to introduce themselves. Then they introduce the facilitators. Starting the discussion is up to the facilitator.

Adding personal touches and background information when appropriate is a part of planning. Is there some way to make this story more relevant? Is there some audio-visual material that can be used? Will a map, historical photo/picture or some other real-life object be helpful? When we read *Sarah, Plain & Tall*, we showed a short portion of the video *Sarah, Plain & Tall* since many of our participants had never seen the Great Plains. During the discussion of *Tar Beach*, the facilitator added some information on the historical importance of slave quilts and showed pictures of quilts from *Stitched From the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Ante-Bellum South*.
The moving and heart-breaking reading of *Letter from Major Sullivan Ballou* on the video *The Civil War, Part I* added a poignant note to the discussion of this letter.

Leading the discussion includes setting up the space and then starting, maintaining and concluding the discussion. Chairs arranged in circles or semi-circles work best for both small and larger groups. If the group is small, talking around a table is fine, too. Keep the set-up as intimate as possible but respect the need for space and elbow room.

If the facilitators are well-prepared, leading the discussion can be enjoyable; certainly, it will be challenging. In addition to preparing questions and the physical space, facilitators will need to think about the dynamics, personalities and problems which might be part of the discussion. How will facilitators draw out participants, keep dominators in check, handle conflicts or disagreements or the unexpected and deal with incorrect answers in terms of text comprehension?

One way our facilitators have handled incorrect answers to factual questions is to say, "I don't remember it that way. Let's check the story" or "Let's see how others remember that." At another discussion where the question of great challenges arose, one participant shared the struggle to learn to read and then thanked his tutor. This

led another participant to do the same. The facilitator realized that thanking each teacher would take a long time so he asked all the teachers/ tutors to stand up and the learners to give them a round of applause. This satisfied all the learners and kept the discussion from getting off track.

If the group is a new one, facilitators might have to set some ground rules and/or orient participants to the discussion process. Tell the participants that you want everyone to feel free to speak, but that speaking in turn, not interrupting, will give everyone a chance to be heard. Remind participants that it is okay to disagree but not to judge or put down someone else's ideas.

After the welcome and introductions, open with an easy question or one that gets everyone on the same track. Often, our facilitators start by having participants recap the story or cast of characters, especially if the text is fiction. A biography discussion might start out with a question that focuses on the individual's significance such as "After reading Langston Hughes' biography, why might he appeal to lots of people?" A set of thematically related readings might lend themselves to a question such as "What did these three letters and one story all have in common? " Since you don't want silence at the beginning of the discussion, make sure that the first question is easy or broad enough to get a ready and wide response.

Getting the group to interact is important. Look at the group and make eye contact with each speaker. Encourage non-speakers with simple, direct questions. With very reluctant speakers, use a simple yes-no question or a question with a one word response. Then acknowledge the speaker's participation so she or he will feel good about speaking up again. Remember that the ideas and opinions of the participants are what matters. Build on their comments since their responses will often suggest questions that had not occurred to you.

Consider closing with summary questions:

How were these stories alike or different?
Give one word that tells how you felt about this story or about the main character.
On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is excellent; 1 is terrible), how would you rate this story?
Would you recommend this story to another person? Why?
If you could meet the author of this story, what would you like to ask him or her?

Kinds of Questions

1. Closed-Ended Questions

Most common. Demand a specific, often detailed answer. Use to speed up discussion, or narrow or zero in on a topic.

Who are the characters in this story?
When was "Dear Bill" written?
Where did Peach Boy take place?
What happened first? Then what happened?

Purpose of closed-ended questions:

- To review information
- To check for understanding or knowledge
- To get back on track when the discussion has gone off track
- To help organize a disorganized or unclear speaker
- To encourage a shy participant who knows the answer to respond

2. Open-Ended Questions

Encourages discussion and response. Allows a variety of responses. Use to explore, evaluate, widen, and slow down a discussion.

Why do you think Langston Hughes felt so deeply about that?
In your opinion, what modern leader is something like Odysseus? Why?
What do you think made Sarah such a strong character?

Purpose of open-ended questions:

- To encourage participation and discussion
- To draw out opinions, values and feelings in addition to facts
- To create and nurture an open environment
- To encourage someone who has a lot of knowledge on a topic to elaborate
- To respond to a challenge in a non-threatening way
- To find out what participants already know

3. Overhead Questions

An open- or closed-ended question asked of the group at large. Use to open and maintain discussion; to introduce a new topic or direction; or to draw several comments or opinions on a given topic.

During what wars were these letters written?
Who can tell us when the Civil War, World War II, and the Vietnam War took place?
Did you enjoy this story? Why?

Purpose of overhead questions:

- Pressures everyone to recall or think of an answer
- Engages the whole group and draws people into the discussion mentally if not verbally

4. Direct Questions

An open- or closed-ended question directed to a specific person. Use more direct questions when participants are reluctant to speak or when you want a response from a wider range of participants or from particular participants.

Mary, what word would you use to describe Myop?
Al, why do you think Momotaro shared his dumplings?
Dorothy, Mary believes that Odysseus has a large ego. Do you agree?

Purpose of direct questions:

- To open a discussion
- To call on a participant for an answer you know she or he has
- To involve a silent participant
- To bypass an overtalkative participant
- To recognize a person who you know is especially knowledgeable on a particular topic
- To bring a talker or drifter back into the discussion

5. Relay Questions

A question posed to the facilitator and then relayed or directed by the facilitator to someone else. Use relay questions spread responsibility for answers and force the participants to think and use their own resources.

Henry, how would you answer Dorothy's question?

Purpose of relay questions:

- To relay a question which the facilitator does not want or need to answer; to avoid committing yourself
- To get others involved in the discussion
- To get opinions other than your own
- To engage a knowledgeable participant
- To draw in a talker or drifter

6. Return Questions

A question posed by a participant and then re-asked of the participant. Use return questions to gently and warmly let the questioner know that you believe she or he is capable of answering.

Sharon, how would you answer your question?

Purpose of return questions:

- To encourage the questioner to think for him- or herself
- To avoid giving your opinion
- To defuse someone who is challenging you
- To allow a participant who really wants a platform to have one

"A balance of question types should be your goal. When [starting] a discussion, draw information and opinions from the group. To gain a balance of participants, use overhead, direct, and relay questions. To control the kind of information you get, use open-ended questions to ask why and get examples; then, use closed-ended questions to pin down the specifics." (p. 89)

This information on questioning was excerpted and adapted from *The Trainers Handbook: The AMA Guide to Effective Training*, 2nd Edition, by Garry Mitchell. Published in 1992 by AMACOM, the American Management Association, 135 W. 50th Street, New York, NY 10020.

7/ Evaluating the Session

"I like the book discussions because I enjoy sharing my opinions and ideas, and I also like being a part of a reading group. I like meeting new people."

A *Feel for Books* Learner Participant

Why evaluate? To find out if you are meeting your goals. To get feedback and input on participant satisfaction and learning. To get information that will help you improve and be more responsive to participant and community needs.

Our pilot project was evaluated by outside evaluators as well as by the participants and scholar facilitators. In general we found out that the reading of literature was encouraged by making it a fun and stimulating experience; it never seemed like an assignment or homework. For one group of learners the book discussion led to a library tour. Most of the learner participants loved the quality of the books and indicated that they would be sharing the books with family members.

Specifically, scholars mentioned that their eyes had been opened to the need to encourage reading opportunities for a variety of age groups and levels. They affirmed the participants' ability to analyze stories on different levels. Scholars were genuinally impressed by participants' enthusiasm and desire to learn.

The outside evaluators, commenting on the scholars, said that the personality of an individual scholar played a key role in group dynamics and had a strong influence on the success of the discussion. All four scholars modeled a love for and excitement about reading and were well prepared, but only two of the four scholars were skilled questioners and really understood a participatory approach to leading a discussion.

Tutors and teacher evaluations showed us that their commitment and willingness to work with students on the stories were crucial to the success of the discussions. They excited their students with their own enthusiasm and made a potentially scary situation less fearful.

The adult learner participants told us that participating made them feel good; they liked hearing from other adult learners. Many said they would read some of the stories to their children, and most of them told us that this was the first time they had been to the library.

The positive feedback from the pilot project participants convinced us to continue the series and to apply for an LSCA Title 6, Library Literacy grant to expand the project. We also learned what makes an effective facilitator: understanding the value

and role of questioning in encouraging discussion; understanding the difference between teaching and facilitating; some experience, if possible, working with adult basic education students; a willingness to listen and see oneself as a learner; a love for reading; and careful preparation.

Because we found out how critical the commitment of programs and teachers and tutors is, we created an advisory committee. Some of our most committed teachers, program coordinators and adult learners serve on the committee. That committee ensures us an organized way to get verbal evaluation of the sessions, helps us to plan future sessions and select readings, and gives us an enthusiastic group of supporters and advocates.

We have used several different kinds of learner participant evaluation forms. The one in current use is a rating sheet which needs some but not lengthy explanation. It allows learners (and teachers if they desire) to simply check a number (1=poor; 5=excellent) in response to five statements; writing comments is optional. We also use a checklist to find out what categories of books and stories participants are most interested in for the coming year.

Evaluation does not need to be an involved or complicated process. It does need to be done if the facilitators and participants and program are to mature.

When planning for evaluation, consider the following questions:

- *Who and or what will get evaluated in your project?*
  Consider all the critical aspects of your project: participants, facilitators, materials, retention/level of participation, changes in reading behavior, project design, collaboration with other agencies, project publicity, etc.

- *When will the evaluation be done?*
  Ongoing during the project/program and at the end. When measuring changes, get information at the beginning, perhaps at some midpoint, and certainly at the end.

- *Who will do the evaluation or be involved in it?*
  Participants, staff, outside evaluator(s), cooperating programs, facilitators, advisory committee, etc.

- *What accomplishments, learnings, changes will you expect?*
  Increased participation in discussions, changes in reading habits, sharing readings with family members, changes in teacher/tutor/

learner definition of reading, exposure to various types of readings, increased use of the library, extent of collaboration/cooperation, etc. Answering this question in the planning stages of the program is crucial; it affects program goals as well as determines the program design and evaluation.

- *How will you get the information needed for evaluation?*
  Questionnaires, surveys, observations, checklists, interviews, rating or evaluation sheets, verbal or written reports from participants, etc. What's important here is to document your expected outcomes.

- *Who gets the results from the evaluation?*
  Facilitators, planners, advisory committee, funders, collaborating agencies or programs, learners, teachers, etc. Keep in mind that each group may need or want different information.

- *How will you use the evaluative information?*
  To improve/modify the program; justify changes or additions; encourage greater participation or funding; recruit facilitators; publicize the program.

8/ General Planning Advice

"It would be an exaggeration to write that every student loved every book — but this is not far from the truth. Students have developed 'favorite' books — the magic that comes from reading books — which are received and 'owned' more than property itself is owned."

ABE Instructor

It usually takes one or two enthusiastic and committed individuals to get any project off the ground and keep it running smoothly. A book discussion is no exception. After a few adult literacy teachers here in Washington, D.C. started talking about the possibility of a book discussion series and tried out a few book discussions during the summer session at a local program, we decided to find out if other teachers, program staff and adult learners might be enthusiastic about book discussions.

There was enough interest to "test the water" so the Adult Basic Education Office at the Library mapped out the three-month pilot project discussed in Chapter 1. Based on the evaluation of the pilot project, we decided to continue and expand the series.

In addition to the suggestions we shared in Chapter 3, "Getting Started — Assessing Needs," we think it is important to consider the following questions as you plan for a book discussion project:

- *What are goals of the project?*
  The goals and objectives of the program need to be clear; they can be changed, but it is important to know what you hope to accomplish and what you need to evaluate.

- *What kind of support is there from literacy providers?*
  Community literacy providers, learners, teachers/tutors.

- Where will sessions be held and how will participants get there?

- When will sessions be held, with what frequency, and for how long?

- Will registration be required?

- What size group will the program allow?
- How will the room be set up? What kind of hospitality will there be?
- How will the program select books and stories?
- What are the costs of the program (books, refreshments, etc.)?
- What kind of publicity/recruitment is necessary?
- How will the program recruit and train discussion facilitators?
- What is the role of adult learners? How can they take some ownership of the program?
- If an advisory committee is established, what is its role?
- What will be evaluated and how?

Students stopped questioning long enough to listen to a young father tell about how he had recently read Wiley and the Hairy Man *to his three-year-old daughter. She enjoyed it so much, she asked him to read it again. "It was the first story I have ever read to her," he said. The group broke out in spontaneous applause.*

From the FFB discussion on
Wiley and the Hairy Man

9/ *A Feel for Books*: An Annotated List of Titles

We have annotated the *Feel For Books* selections in the order in which we read and discussed them. If more than one selection was read and discussed at a given session, the selections appear as a set. See **References** at the end of the guide for complete citations.

"The Ibo Landing Story" as told by Frankie and Doug Quimby

A tale about 18 members of the African Ibo tribe who were tricked into coming to America to be sold as slaves. After examining their potential future, they decide to commit mass suicide by linking arms and walking out into Dunbar Creek on one of the Sea Islands in Georgia. The movie, "Daughters of the Dust," incorporated this story.

"The People Could Fly" by Virginia Hamilton

An African-American tale about slaves from Africa who had the magical ability to fly. After toiling in the fields, unable to withstand the oppression a moment longer, they simply flew to freedom.

"A Christmas Love Story" (Part 1) by Julius Lester

A riveting story about William and Ellen Craft, two slaves from Georgia, and their brilliant and daring escape to freedom in Philadelphia.

***To Hell With Dying* by Alice Walker**

A touching story about the miracles that can happen as well as the boundaries that can be erased in relationships between the very young and the very old. Beautiful illustrations created by award-winning artist Catherine Deeter.

***The Hundred Penny Box* by Sharon Bell Mathis**

A story about an African-American boy's love for his great-great aunt, Dew. An artful study of advanced age and childhood, masterfully illustrated in shadowy water-colors that underscore the intimacy of the family relationship.

"He Lion, Bruh Bear and Bruh Rabbit" by Virginia Hamilton

A tale involving small animals fearing those who are larger and the idea that even the most powerful animals have reason to fear man.

"John and the Devil's Daughter" by Virginia Hamilton

An African-American tale about a hero named John de Conquer. In his quest to find work with the Devil, he ultimately marries the Devil's daughter. Supernatural forces and magic add intrigue and excitement to this story.

"A Christmas Love Story" (Part 2) by Julius Lester

The continuing story of William and Ellen Craft. Two years after their escape from slavery, they make their home in Boston only to face the prospect of slavery once again due to the Fugitive Slave Bill signed by President Fillmore.

***Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold**

A brilliantly colorful book, *Tar Beach* tells of eight-year-old Cassie's magical trick of flying above New York City and seeing everything. Woven into this charming, little-girl fantasy are several adult themes: African-American life in Harlem, discrimination in employment, hard work, the beauty of the night and the experience of slavery.

"Stars" and "Aunt Sue's Stories," poems by Langston Hughes

"Stars" is a beautiful poem about living with hope and maintaining the ability to dream.

"Aunt Sue's Stories" is a poem about Aunt Sue relating her own experiences of slavery to her young nephew. Illustrates the African-American tradition of intergenerational storytelling.

***Wiley and the Hairy Man* retold by Molly Bang**

***Wiley and the Hairy Man* told by storyteller Charlotte Smutko**

Well-named Wiley and his conjuring mother outwit the hairy man-magician in this classical African-American folktale which is funny, suspenseful and satisfying to heart and head. With classy, earth-tone illustrations.

***Langston Hughes: Poet of Harlem* by Norita D. Larson**

A short biography of poet and writer Langston Hughes who for nearly 50 years wrote about what he knew best: how it feels to be black in America. The photos, poems and text help to convey Hughes' love for his people and the written word.

"The Flowers" by Alice Walker

Myop, the ten-year-old daughter of sharecropper parents, appreciates the late summer beauty and peacefulness of her immediate environment but also discovers the ugliness that lies just beyond its borders.

"The Welcome Table" by Alice Walker

The poetic story of an elderly black woman and her experience attending an all-white church. After being forcibly removed from the premises, her ultimate joy is found walking down a long road with Jesus in the bitter cold.

"Malcolm X: Black and Proud" by Florence M. White

This biography of Malcolm X relates his earlier life experiences and his affiliation with the Nation of Islam until his untimely death in 1965.

"Farewell to Black Hawk" by Chief Black Hawk

"Farewell to Black Hawk," a speech given by Chief Black Hawk after his defeat, recaps the Indian Nation's relationship with the white man. He gives compelling reasons for their attempted revolt.

"Flower-Fed Buffaloes," a poem by Vachel Lindsay

"Buffalo Dust," a poem by Carl Sandburg

Heartfelt poems about the extinction of flowers, buffaloes and Indian tribes due to the expansion of agriculture and industry.

Letters H♥me (a collection of four readings from various sources)

Letter from Major Sullivan Ballou

A beautiful love letter to his wife from Civil War Major Sullivan Ballou, killed at the Battle of Bull Run

***Appointment With Love* by S. Kishnor**

A romantic story with a twist. A woman exchanges letters with a World War II soldier. They are finally about to meet.

Letter from 2 Lt. Sharon A. Lane

The writer was stationed in Vietnam as a nurse. This is a letter she sent home soon before her death at age 26.

Dear Bill

A letter to her son from a mother visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

***Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan**

Caleb, Anna, and their widowed father write for a mail-order mom. Happiness, hope, and what it takes to make a family. A Newberry Award Medal winner.

***Peach Boy* by William H. Hooks**

A traditional Japanese folktale in which an old couple wants a child to protect them from a monster, and so he does. Magic, animals, and beautiful illustrations. Good for family reading.

"In the Cave of the One-Eyed Giant" adapted from *The Iliad and the Odyssey*

Odysseus and his men, on their way home from the Trojan War, find themselves on a strange island, peopled by one-eyed giants, the Cyclopes. How they outwit Polyphemus, one of the giants, is the heart of this tale.

***Abiyoyo* retold by Pete Seeger**

***Abiyoyo* told by storyteller Charlotte Smutko**

A modern folktale which Pete Seeger created from a South African lullaby and folk story. With a nice introduction by Seeger on reinventing stories and comparing a monster to McCarthy's witchhunt and to the depersonalization of the age of technology. Dad and son are sent to live at the edge of town for annoying the townspeople with their magic. Abiyoyo the Giant terrorizes the town, and they save the day. Includes the Abiyoyo song and colorful illustrations.

***Tailypo* retold by Jan Wahl**

***Tailypo* told by storyteller Charlotte Smutko**

A dramatic and spooky folktale with bold, scary illustrations and themes of revenge, lying, and pursuit. This tale set in Tennessee tells of the consequences of killing a creature with a great, big, long tail.

"The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant

The ironic story of poor Madame Loisel and her ill-fated desire for material possessions.

"The Open Window" by Saki

The story of Framton Nuttel and his escape to the country in search of tranquility. After visiting with the Sappleton family, particularly with Vera, a masterful storyteller, Framton's nerves will never be calm again. Humor and horror are masterfully intertwined in this intriguing narrative.

10/ Selected Stories and Facilitator Questions

In this section we have included the texts from several of the stories and books we've read along with sample questions and some notes for facilitators. We have chosen several different kinds of selections in order to feature the variety for which we strive as well as the kinds of readings which have worked well with our urban, primarily African-American population: a children's book and traditional Japanese folktale, *The Peach Boy*; a classical Greek tale, *In the Cave of the One-Eyed Giant*; our Letters H❤me collection of three letters and one short story, set in war times; and two of Alice Walker's short stories.

The Flowers

by Alice Walker

It seemed to Myop as she skipped lightly from hen house to pigpen to smokehouse that the days had never been as beautiful as these. The air held a keeness that made her nose twitch. The harvesting of the corn and cotton, peanuts and squash, made each day a golden surprise that caused excited little tremors to run up her jaws.

Myop carried a short, knobby stick. She struck out at random at chickens she liked, and worked out the beat of a song on the fence around the pigpen. She felt light and good in the warm sun. She was ten, and nothing existed for her but her song, and the stick clutched in her dark brown hand, and the tat-de-ta-ta-ta of accompaniment.

Turning her back on her family's sharecropper cabin, Myop walked along the fence till it ran into the stream made by the spring. Around the stream, where the family got drinking water, silver ferns and wildflowers grew. Along the shallow banks pigs rooted. Myop watched the tiny white bubbles disrupt the thin black scale of soil and the water that silently rose and slid away down the stream.

She had explored the woods behind the house many times. Often, in late autumn, her mother took her to gather nuts among the fallen leaves. Today she made her own path, bouncing this way and that way, vaguely keeping an eye out for snakes. She found, in addition to various common but pretty ferns and leaves, an armful of strange blue flowerswith velvety ridges and a sweetsuds bush full of the brown, fragrant buds.

By twelve o'clock, her arms laden with sprigs of her findings, she was a mile or more from home. She had often been as far before, but the strangeness of the land made it not as pleasant as usual haunts. It seemed gloomy in the little cove in which she found herself. The air was damp, the silence close and deep.

Myop began to circle back to the house, back to the peacefulness of the morning. It was then she stepped smack into his eyes. Her heel became lodged in the broken ridge between his brow and nose, and she reached down quickly, unafraid, to free herself. It was only when she saw his naked grin that she gave a little yelp of surprise.

He had been a tall man. From feet to neck covered a long space. His head lay beside him. When she pushed back the layers of earth and debris, Myop saw that he'd had large white teeth, all of them cracked or broken, long fingers, and very big bones. All his clothes had rotted away except some threads of blue denim from his overalls. The buckles of the overalls had turned green.

Myop gazed around the spot with interest. Very near where she'd stepped into the head was a wild pink rose. As she picked it to add to her bundle she noticed a

raised mound, a ring, around the rose's root. It was the rotted remains of a noose, a bit of shredding plowline, now blending benignly into the soil. Around an overhanging limb of a great spreading oak clung another piece. Frayed, rotted, bleached, and frazzled — barely there — but spinning restlessly in the breeze. Myop laid down her flowers.

And the summer was over.

The Welcome Table

by Alice Walker
for sister Clara Ward

I'm going to sit at the Welcome table
Shout my troubles over
Walk and talk with Jesus
Tell God how you treat me
One of these days!
— Spiritual

The old woman stood with eyes uplifted in her Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes: high shoes polished around the tops and toes, a long rusty dress adorned with an old corsage, long withered, and the remnants of an elegant silk scarf as head rag stained with grease from the many oily pigtails underneath. Perhaps she had known suffering. There was a dazed and sleepy look in her aged blue-brown eyes. But for those who searched hastily for "reasons" in that old tight face, shut now like an ancient door, there was nothing to be read. And so they gazed nakedly upon their own fear transferred; a fear of the black and the old, a terror of the unknown as well as of the deeply known. Some of those who saw her on the church steps spoke words about her that were hardly fit to be heard, others held their pious peace; and some felt vague stirrings of pity, small and persistent and hazy, as if she were an old collie turned out to die.

She was angular and lean and the color of poor gray Georgia earth, beaten by king cotton and the extreme weather. Her elbows were wrinkled and thick, the skin ashen but durable, like the bark of old pines. On her face, centuries were folded into the circles around one eye while around the other, etched and mapped as if for print, ages more threatened again to live. Some of them there at the church saw the age, the dotage, the missing buttons down the front of her mildewed black dress. Others saw cooks, chauffeurs, maids, mistresses, children denied or smothered in the deferential way she held her cheek to one side, toward the ground. Many of them saw jungle orgies in an evil place, while others were reminded of riotous anarchists looting and raping in the streets. Those who knew the hesitant creeping up on them of the law, saw the beginning of the end of the sanctuary of Christian worship, saw the desecration of Holy Church, and saw an invasion of privacy, which they struggled to believe

they still kept.

Still she had come down the road toward the big white church alone. Just herself, an old forgetful woman, nearly blind with age. Just her and her eyes raised dully to the glittering cross that crowned the sheer, silver steeple. She had walked along the road in a stagger from her house a half mile away. Perspiration, cold and clammy, stood on her brow and along the creases by her thin wasted nose. She stopped to calm herself on the wide, front steps, not looking about her as they expected her to do, but simply standing quite still, except for the slight quivering of her throat and tremors that shook her cotton-stockinged legs.

The reverend stopped her pleasantly as she stepped into the vestibule. Did he say, as they thought he did, kindly, "Auntie, you know this is not your church?" As if one could choose the wrong one. But no one remembers, for they never spoke of it afterward, and she brushed past him anyway, as if she had been brushing past him all her life, except this time she was in a hurry. Inside the church she sat on the first bench from the back, gazing with concentration at the stained window over her head. It was cold inside the church, and she was shivering. Everybody could see. They stared at her as they came in and sat down near the front. It was cold, very cold to them too; outside the church it was below freezing and not much above inside. But the sight of her, sitting there passionately ignoring them, made them burn.

The young usher had never turned anyone out of his church before, but not even considering this job as that (after all, she had no right to be there, certainly), went up to her and whispered that she should leave. Did he call her "Grandma," as later he seemed to recall he had? But for those who actually hear such traditional pleasantries and to whom they actually mean something, "Grandma" was not one, for she not pay him any attention, just muttered she did not pay him any attention, just muttered, "Go 'way," in a weak sharp bothered voice, waving his frozen blond hair and eyes from her face.

It was the ladies who finally did what had to be done. Daring their burly, indecisive husbands to throw the old colored woman out they made their point. God, mother, country, earth, church. It involved all that, .and well they knew it. Leather bagged and shoed, with good calfskin gloves to keep out the cold, they looked with contempt at the bloodless gray arthritic hands of the old woman, clenched loosely, restlessly in her lap. Could their husbands expect them to sit in church with that? No, no, the husbands were quick to answer and even quicker to do their duty.

Under the old woman's arms they placed their hard fists (which afterward smelled of decay and musk–the fermenting scent of onionskins and rotting greens). Under the old woman's arms they raised their fists, flexed their muscular shoulders, and out she flew through the door, back under the cold blue sky. This done, the wives folded their

healthy arms across their trim middles and felt at once justified. But none of them said so, for none of them ever spoke of the incident again. Inside the church it was warmer. They sang, they prayed. The protection and promise of God's impartial love grew more not less desirable as the sermon gathered fury and lashed itslef out above their penitent heads.

The old woman stood at the top of the steps looking about in bewilderment. She had been singing in her head. They had interrupted her. Promptly she began to sing again, though this time a sad song. Suddenly, however, she looked down the long gray highway and saw something interesting and delightful coming. She started to grin, toothlessly, with short giggles of joy, jumping about and slapping her hands on her knees. And, soon it became apparent why she was so happy. For coming down the highway at a firm though leisurely pace was Jesus. He was wearing an immaculate long white, long dress trimmed in gold around the neck and hem, and a red, a bright red, cape. Over his left arm he carried a brilliant blue blanket. He was wearing sandals and a beard and he had long brown hair parted on the right side. His eyes, brown, had wrinkles around them as if he smiled or looked at the sun a lot. She would have known him, recognized him, anywhere. There was a sad but joyful look to his face, like a candle was glowing behind it, and he walked with sure even steps in her direction, as if he were walking on the sea. Except that he was not in his arms a baby sheep, he looked just like the picture of him that she had hanging over her bed at home. She had taken it out of a white lady's Bible while she was working for her. She had looked at that picture for more years than she could remember, but never once had she really expected to see him. She squinted her eyes to be sure he wasn't carrying a little sheep in one arm, but he ws not. Ecstatically she began to wave her arms for fear he would miss seeing her, for he walked looking straight ahead on the shoulder of the highway, and from time to time looking upward at the sky.

All he said when he got up close to her was "Follow me," and she bounded down to his side with all the bob and speed of one so old. For every one of his long determined steps she made two quick ones. They walked along in deep silence for some time. Finally she started telling him about how many years she had cooked for them, cleaned for them, nursed them. He looked at her kindly but in silence. She told him indignantly about how they had grabbed her when she was singing in her head and not looking, and how they had tossed her out of his church. An old heifer like me, she said, straightening up next to Jesus, breathing hard. But he smiled down at her and she felt better instantly, and time just seemed to fly by. When they passed her house, forlorn and sagging,weatherbeaten and patched, by the side of the road, she did not even notice it, she was so happy to be out walking along the highway with Jesus.

She broke the silence once more to tell Jesus how glad she was that he had come. How she had often looked at his picture hanging on her wall (she hoped he didn't know she had stolen it) over her bed, and how she had never expected to see him down here in person. Jesus gave her one of his beautiful smiles, and they walked on. She did not know where they were going; someplace wonderful, she suspected. The ground was like clouds under their feet, and she felt she could walk forever without becoming the least bit tired. She even began to sing out loud some of the old spirituals she loved, but she didn't want to annoy Jesus, who looked so thoughtful, so she quieted down. They walked on, looking straight over the treetops into the sky, and the smiles that played over her dry wind-cracked face were like clean ripples across a stagnant pond. On they walked without stopping.

The people in church never knew what happened to the old woman. They never mentioned her to one another or to anybody else. Most of them heard sometime later than an old colored woman fell dead along the highway. Silly as it seemed, it appeared she had walked herself to death. Many of the black families along the road said they had seen the old lady high-steppping down the highway; sometimes jabbering in a low insistent voice, sometimes singing, sometimes merely gestering excitedly with her hands. Other times silent and smiling, looking at the sky. She had been alone, they said. Some of them wondered aloud where the old woman had been going so stoutly that it had worn her heart out. They guessed maybe she had relatives across the river some miles away, but none of them really knew.

Facilitator Outline and Questions

"The Flowers"

Focus especially on setting, mood, figures of speech amd vocabulary, and the title.

1. What time of year is it?
2. Who is Myop? Tell us about her.
3. What was Myop's mood at the start of the story?
4. What was she thinking about?
5. She left the farm. Where did she go? Has she done this before?
6. Is she rich or poor? How does her poor compare to others kinds of poor?
7. What was she watching out for? (snake)
8. How are the snake and a dead body alike?
9. Where did things start to change in the story?
10. Was this a "golden" surprise?
11. Why did Myop lay down her flowers?
12. Why is "The Flowers" the title?
13. Why did Myop react the way she did?
14. What do you think about this story? Did you get it?
15. What causes a person to lose innocence?
16. What childhood experiences have you had that changed you?
17. When did you figure out what Myop stumbled on?
18. How long ago did that man get there?
19. What does the last sentence of the story mean? "And the summer was over."

"The Welcome Table"

Walk through the story. What is happening in each paragraph?

1. What is the plot of the story? Who are the characters? What do we know about the old woman?
2. When did the story take place?
3. How did the old woman feel after going into the church?
4. How did the people in the church treat the old woman? Why?
5. What are the moods of the story? When do they change?
6. What did Jesus look like to the old woman? Why?

7. Why do you think the old woman saw Jesus outside the church and not inside it?
8. Did the church people feel better or worse after the woman was gone? Why do you think the church people felt guilty about what they had done?
9. What did Jesus say to the woman? What was Jesus thinking?
10. How did the old woman feel about Jesus?
11. How did you feel when you read this story?
12. Do you hear Alice Walker's voice in this story? How does Alice Walker feel about the old woman? About the church people?
13. What were "the laws"?
14. What does the title, "The Welcome Table," mean?

Letter from Major Sullivan Ballou

The Civil War began in April 1861. Confederate and Union forces fought in a battle near the town of Manassas by a creek called Bull Run. A week before the battle, Major Sullivan Ballou of the 2nd Rhode Island wrote home to his wife in Smithfield.

From *The Civil War: An Illustrated History* by Geoffrey C. Ward, Ric Burns, and Ken Burns

July 14, 1861
Camp Clark, Washington

My very dear Sarah:

The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days — perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write again, I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more....

I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American Civilization now leans on the triumph of the Government and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and sufferings of the Revolution. And I am willing — perfectly willing — to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this Government and to pay that debt....

Sarah my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence could break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me unresistibly on with all these chains to the battle field.

The memories of the blissful moments I have spent with you come creeping over me, and I feel most gratified to God and to you that I have enjoyed them so long. And hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and seen our sons grown up to honorable manhood, around us. I have, I know, but few and small claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me — perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battle field, it will whisper your name. Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I

have caused you. How thoughtless and foolish I have often times been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears every little spot upon your happiness.

But O Sarah! If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the gladdest days and in the darkest night.... always, always, and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath, as the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for me, for we shall meet again....

Sullivan Ballou was killed at the first battle of Bull Run on July 21, 1861.

Appointment with Love
by S. I. Kishor

Six minutes to six, said the clock in Grand Central Station. The army lieutenant lifted his sunburned face. His eyes stared at the clock. His heart was pounding and he could not control it. In six minutes, he would see the woman who had filled such a special place in his life for the past thirteen months.

He placed himself as close as he could to the information booth.

Lieutenant Blandford remembered one night during the worst of the fighting, when his plane had been caught in the middle of a pack of Zeros. He had seen the face of one of the enemy pilots.

In one of his letters, he had told her that he often felt fear. She wrote back: "Of course you fear . . . all brave men do. That's why King David wrote the Twenty-third Psalm. Next time you feel fear, I want you to hear my voice saying to you: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me' . . . " And he had remembered. He had heard her voice, and it had brought him strength.

Now he was going to hear her real voice. Four minutes to six. His face grew sharp.

A girl passed close to him and Lieutenant Blandford started. She was wearing a red flower in her suit. But it was a sweet pea, not the red rose they had agreed upon. Besides, this girl was about eighteen, and Hollis Meynell had told him she was thirty. "What of it?" he had answered. "I'm thirty-two." He was twenty-nine.

His mind went back to that book. The book the Lord Himself must have put into his hands out of the hundreds of books sent to the army training camp. It was *Of Human Bondage*. In the book were notes in a woman's writing. He had never believed that a woman could see into a man's heart so understandingly. Her name was on the bookplate: Hollis Meynell. He had got hold of a New York City telephone book and found her address. He had written. She had answered. Next day he had been shipped out, but they had gone on writing.

For thirteen months, she had written. When his letters did not arrive, she wrote anyway. Now he believed he loved her, and she loved him.

But she wouldn't send him her photograph. She had explained: "If your feeling for me is real and honest, what I look like won't matter. Suppose I'm beautiful. I'd always think that you had been taking a chance on just that. That kind of love would disgust

me. Suppose I'm plain. Then I'd always fear that you were writing to me only because you were lonely. Don't ask for my picture. When you come to New York, you shall see me. Then you shall make your decision. Both of us are free to stop or to go on after that."

One minute to six....

Then Lieutenant Blandford's heart leaped higher than his plane had ever done.

A young woman was coming toward him. Her blond hair was in curls, and her eyes were blue as flowers. In her green suit, she was like springtime.

He started toward her, not noticing that she was wearing no rose. As he moved, she smiled.

"Going my way, soldier?" she said.

He made one step closer to her. Then he saw Hollis Meynell.

She was standing behind the girl, a woman well past forty with graying hair. She was plump with thick-ankled feet. But she wore a red rose in her old brown coat.

The girl in the green suit was walking away.

Blandford felt split in two. He wanted to follow the girl, but he also wanted the woman whose spirit had upheld him. And there she stood. Her pale, plump face was gentle and sensible. Her gray eyes had a warm, kindly twinkle.

Lieutenant Blandford did not hesitate. His fingers held the worn copy of *Of Human Bondage*. This would not be love, but it would be something rarer — a friendship for which he was ever grateful.

He squared his shoulders, and held the book out toward the woman. But even while he spoke he felt his disappointment.

"I'm Lieutenant John Blandford, and you are Miss Meynell. I'm so glad you could meet me. May I take you to dinner?"

The woman's face broadened in a smile. "I don't know what this is all about, son," she answered. "That young lady in the green suit who just went by asked me to wear this rose on my coat. She said that if you asked me to go out with you, I should tell you that she's waiting for you in that restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of a test. I've got two boys with Uncle Sam myself, so I didn't mind to oblige you."

Letter from 2 Lt. Sharon A. Lane

The writer of this letter was stationed in Vietnam. During the 1960s the number of deaths from the Vietnamese war was high. Americans at home were debating our involvement in the war. When the soldiers came home, they were not greeted by parades, but by thousands of angry people who wanted peace at home and our troops out of Vietnam.

This letter was sent home to family members. It is filled with details of the long days spent in a jungle climate — far from home in Ohio.

4 June 1969
Wednesday

Dear Mom & Dad,

Got your letter of 28th, Mom, yesterday, 3 June. Today I got Dad's of 26th April. Never know what is going on with the mail. Haven't gotten the package yet. Heaven only knows when they will arrive and in what condition.

Worked in ICU [Intense Care Unit] again today. Was lucky, got to 102 degrees today, and ICU is air-conditioned. They have a lot of really sick patients. Had three die yesterday. They still have four on respirators. None too good, either.

One of the GI's who died yesterday was from Ward 8, medical. During the previous night he had been nauseated and kept getting up to the latrine to vomit. Got up at 2 a.m. and was running to the latrine. Fell really hard and cracked his head on the cement floor. The nurse who was on duty said you hear his skull fracture. He immediately started bleeding from ears and nose and stopped breathing. Then had cardiac arrest. They got him going again and transferred him to ICU but he died anyway yesterday. Had severe brain damage. Other death was a GI with multiple fragment wounds from mine explosion. He was there two weeks ago when I worked that other day in ICU. Also a Vietnamese died. Don't know what was wrong with him.

Census hit the 10,000 mark yesterday. This unit, the 312th [Evacuation Hospital], has treated 10,000 patients since we arrived last September. Unbelievable. Registrar office had a poll going as to what time and what date the 10,000 patient would be

admitted. Was yesterday morning. Haven't head who won the money yet

They put plastic or rubber floor tile down in the mess hall the evening before last. Looked real nice until yesterday noon when it got hot. The tar came up between the tile and it got tracked all over the place. Couldn't move your chair at all. It was stuck to the floor.

How did the home-made ice cream turn out? Start "nights" tomorrow so don't have to get up early tomorrow. Nice thought.

Still very quiet around here. Haven't gotten mortared for couple of weeks now. We are getting some new nurses this week. They are from the unit who will take over when the 312th goes home in September. Their hospital is farther south somewhere. They are handling 80% Vietnamese casualties now so are turning their hospital over to the Viets and coming here to take over. Supposed to get the new chief nurse tomorrow. So the unit will change names in September. However, they are supposed to be an RA [Regular Army] group. Not a reserve unit like the 312th is. Things are supposed to get a lot more "strict Army style." No one is looking forward to it.

Read a book last night and missed a good Lee Marvin movie at the mess hall.

Had a movie star visit here the second or third week I was here. Named Ricardo Montalban? Ever hear of him? Forgot to mention it previously. Some of the older people here remembered him. Said he was in movies with Esther Williams.

Will stop for now. Getting sleepy.

See you sooner.

Shar

2 Lt. Sharon A. Lane, a nurse from Canton, Ohio, arrived at the 312th Evacuation Hospital, Chu Lai, in April 1969. Two months later, on 8 June, she was killed by shrapnel during a rocket attack. She was one month short of her 26th birthday.

Dear Bill

Dear Bill,

Today I come to this memorial, this black wall. I come to put flowers and a letter, not because it's a special day, like your birthday or Memorial Day. But just because it's Tuesday, and just because I love and miss you so much and want the whole world to know.

The other day I saw a picture of Elvis Presley on a poster in a music store window. Under his picture it read, "Remember I lived, forget I died." I stood looking at this for a long time, wondering how you could possibly forget that someone you loved so much had died.

Yes, I remember that you lived. I remember our laughter together and our tears when your rabbits died and especially when your grandparents died. I remember when you would get mad at me because you had to do the dishes or carry out the trash or be in bed a certain time on school nights. But I can't forget that you died. I will never forget the long days of waiting for your body to be returned from Vietnam. I will never forget the millions of tears I have shed. And I can't forget the terrible hurt because you are not with me and never will be again.

I have cried many, many tears since you left us because I saw no reason for you to die then, and I see no reason now. But this I do know: you are happier with God in heaven than you could ever be on earth. So forgive me, my son, my Billy, when I cry because most of my tears are for me, I guess, because you are not with me, and I miss you so.

Mom

Facilitator Outline and Questions

Letters H❤me

Establish times and places of each letter.

Letter from Major Sullivan Ballou [The Civil War]

Listen to letter as read on videotape: *The Civil War, Part 1.*

1. How did it make you feel to hear the letter read this way?
2. What kind of letter is this? Is it a love letter? Why/why not?
3. Does the letter sound old-fashioned to you? Why is that?
4. Is there anything you didn't understand?
5. What are the two duties/responsibilities that SB wrote about?
   — duty to country
   — duty to/love for family
6. Is there a conflict between these two for SB?
7. How does SB express facing death? Is there a sense of hope in his letter?
8. What might have happened to his wife and children after his death?
9. Could you actually find out what happened to them? How?
10. Anything else you want to comment on?

Appointment with Love [World War II]

1. This story is fiction. What does that mean? Could this story have really happened?
2. Why is this story included with the other letters?
3. Review the story: plot and characters. Why did Hollis write to Lt. Blandford but refuse to send him a photo?
   — Refer to the letter, paragraph 9
4. Contrast the two women, Hollis and the mother. What attracted Lt. Blandford to Hollis?
   — Refer to the letter, paragraph 1-4
5. How does World War II figure in this story?
6. How do you think Lt. Blandford, Hollis and the mother feel about war?
7. What do you think happened when the Lieutenant went across the street to meet Hollis?
8. Other comments?

Letter from 2 Lt. Sharon Lane [Vietnam War]

1. How is the style and content of this letter different from the others?
   — much more informal, choppy
   — focus is on the ordinary and the present
   — war seen as a job
2. How did Sharon Lane probably feel about the war? About human life?
   — physical realities of war
3. Were the conditions the same as or different from the Civil War?
4. How do you think this letter came to be published?
5. Where could you probably find Lt. Lane's name memorialized?
   — Vietnam Memorial, Panel 23 West, Line 112

Dear Bill [Vietnam War]

1. What is different about this letter? Who wrote it?
2. What is the purpose of this letter?
3. What's the purpose of the Vietnam Memorial?
4. How do you know that Bill's mom is probably angry? How did she feel about the war?
5. How might Bill answer his mom's letter?
6. What might you say to his mother?

Conclusion/Summary

1. Which of these letters is the most moving/saddest/most realistic to you? Why?
2. What is the same about all these letters? What links them together?
3. If all the characters in these letters were here, what do you think they would say about war? What might you want to say to them or ask them?
4. What is the advantage of writing letters?

Peach Boy

A long time ago in the land of Japan there lived an old couple. They were very poor, but they did not wish for gold or fine clothes. They only wished for one thing. They longed for a child.

"We are getting old," said the man.

"Soon I will not be able to work. Who will look after us? Who will protect us from the wicked oni monsters?"

"I wish we had a son!" said the woman.

"Wishes can' t take care of us," said the old man sadly.

Then off he went to cut wood.

The old woman went to the river to wash clothes. She rubbed the clothes on a rock. Squish, squish, squish. With every squish the old woman said, "I wish, I wish, I wish."

After a while she rested. She was tired of washing and wishing.

Suddenly she saw something strange floating in the river. It was a huge peach!

The woman picked up the peach and brought it home.

"Not what I wished for," she said, "but it is a beautiful peach!"

The old man thought so, too.

"Such a peach," he cried.

"It will last us a week! Let's cut it open right now!"

The old woman got a knife. She started to cut the peach.

"Stop!" cried a voice. "Do not harm me!"

The voice came from inside the peach.

The old couple couldn't believe their ears. Then the peach split in half. Out jumped a baby boy! Now they couldn't believe their eyes.

The baby said, "I'm a gift from God. God heard your wishes. I will be your son."

The old couple was happy. At last they had a child!

"We'll call you Momotaro!" they said.

It was a good name because Momotaro means Peach Boy.

While Momotaro was growing up, the oni monsters stole from his village.

Everyone was afraid of them, but no one was willing to fight them.

Momotaro said, "Someday I will."

When he was fifteen years old, he spoke with his parents. "It is time I helped you and my village," he said. "I will free our land of the wicked oni monsters who steal our things and frighten our people."

The old couple was worried but proud of Momotaro, too. They agreed he could go.

"Be strong, my son," said the old man, and he gave Momotaro his sword.

"Be careful," said the old woman, and she gave him a bag of dumplings.

"I'll come back soon," Momotaro promised.

Momotaro had not gone far when he met a hungry dog. The dog growled.

"Here, have a dumpling," said Momotaro.

The dog quickly ate the dumpling and asked, "Where are you going?"

"To fight the oni monsters," said Momotaro.

"Then I'll help you," said the dog.

They walked a long way through the woods. The dog spotted a monkey and began to bark.

"Where are you going?" asked the monkey

"To fight the oni monsters," said Momotaro. And he gave the monkey a dumpling.

Momotaro led the way, followed by the dog and the monkey. They walked a long way. At last they saw the fort where the oni monsters lived.

Suddenly a hawk flew over them. "Where are you going?" he cried.

"To fight the oni monsters," said Momotaro.

"Let me help," said the hawk.

"Come along," said Momotaro, and he gave the hawk a dumpling.

When they reached the fort, they saw the huge oni monsters looking down from the walls.

"We've come to fight you," shouted Momotaro.

The oni monsters laughed. "A boy, a dog, a monkey, and a hawk!" they roared. "We'll squash you like fleas!"

While they were laughing, the hawk flew over the walls. He dived at the monsters' heads. He clawed and pecked them. An oni tried to hit him, but the hawk was too fast.

The monkey ran to the gate. She climbed up and opened it, while the hawk pecked at the monsters.

A huge oni grabbed the monkey. She tried to get away, but the oni was too strong.

Momotaro and the dog dashed inside the fort. The dog bit the oni's leg. The oni let the monkey go.

Another oni rushed up. Momotaro stopped him with his sword.

"All together," Momotaro yelled, "attack the oni monsters!"

The hawk pecked their heads. The monkey bit their arms. The dog chewed their legs — and Momotaro cut them down with his sword.

The monsters were so frightened, they gave up and fell to their knees. They made

a promise to Momotaro. "We'll never steal again. We'll never again harm your people."

Then they gave Momotaro all of their stolen treasure. Momotaro and his friends loaded the treasure in a cart.

They carried it back to the old couple's house.

The old couple was overjoyed to see their son.

"The oni monsters will do no more harm," said Momotaro. "And this treasure is for all for you."

"It's far more than we need," said the old man.

"We will share it with all of our friends," said the old woman.

The old couple and Momotaro lived together happily. They were never lonely — not with the dog, and the monkey, and the hawk to keep them company.

In the Cave of the One-Eyed Giant

from the *Odyssey* by Homer

Introduction

One day, about 3000 years ago (1000 B.C.), a brightly painted ship sailed into a harbor of the land now called Greece. On the ship's deck was a man wearing a rough goat's wool cape wrapped around him. Under his cape he held a lyre (a small harp). This was the most valuable thing he owned, for the man was a wandering minstrel (singer). He traveled from place to place, singing songs that told the tales of great heroes and brave deeds.

The coming of a minstrel was a great occasion because people were eager to hear the story-songs they sang. These were songs of men and gods, of wars and adventure, of strange and wonderful happenings in history and legend. Even then, the stories were already old. They had never been written down, for there were no books in those days. One minstrel learned the stories from another. And they were passed down and kept alive for hundreds of years.

Each minstrel told his tales in his own way — and the greatest minstrel was Homer. He was one of the master story-tellers of all time, and the first whose name has come down in history. Homer told two of the greatest stories ever told: *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. *The Iliad* tells of the Trojan war, a long war between the Greeks and the Trojans. *The Odyssey* tells the adventures of Odysseus, a brave and powerful man who had countless adventures on land and sea trying to get back home after the Trojan War was over.

Here now is the story of one of Odysseus' adventures in the cave of the one-eyed giant.

Story

My true name is Odysseus, but I once used another name. That name saved my life, and now I will tell you the story.

As I was sailing home from Troy with my men, strong winds blew our ship into strange waters. We reached land, but it was a land we did not know.

So I took 12 men with me to go exploring. Soon we came upon a huge cave. We found no one inside, but there were huge cheeses and pails of milk and pens crowded with lambs and kids.

"We will wait and find out what kind of man lives here," I said. "Maybe we can be

friends with this man."

But that was not to be. For as soon as my men saw him coming, they were terrified and ran to the back of the cave to hide.

He was a giant, three times taller than I am. He had one eye — one giant eye in the middle of his forehead.

Now I had heard tales of one-eyed giants called Cyclopes. They were fierce and wild so I feared for my men.

This Cyclops named Polyphemus drove ten huge sheep into the cave and milked them.

Then he took up a heavy rock and set it in the mouth of the cave. It closed out the daylight, so the one-eyed giant lit his fire. And by the light of that fire, he saw us.

"Who are you?" he called out. "And why are you here?"

At the sound of his terrible voice the hearts of my men cracked with terror

"We are strangers," I said, and he picked up two of my men and banged their heads on the ground. Then he ate them!

"Tell me your name, oh leader of these men," said the Cyclops. "Tell me your name so that I may thank you for this fine lunch that I have eaten. What is your name?"

A plan started to form in my mind. I answered him slowly. "My name is Noman," I said.

My men looked at me strangely. They knew that my true name was Odysseus, but they said nothing.

"Then I will call you Noman," said Cyclops. "And I will eat two more of your men after my nap, Noman," he added. Then he lay down and went to sleep.

My first wish was to take my sword and try to kill him right then.

But my second thoughts held me back. Even if I could do this, how would we get out of the cave? My men and I could not roll away the huge stone at the door.

But a plan was growing in my mind.

I waited until he was in deep sleep, and then I found a long six-foot branch of green olive wood. I sharpened one end, and then I chose four men.

We put the pointed end of the stick into the fire, rushed at Polyphemus, and thrust it into his eye. He raised a cry that made the rocks ring. His cries brought other Cyclopes to the mouth of the cave. They called out and asked him what hurt him.

"Noman!" he yelled. "Noman hurt me."

One of them said, "If no man hurt you, you should not have raised such a cry."

"Listen!" he shouted. "I tell you Noman caused this pain in my eye."

"If no man caused it, it will soon go away," said the Cyclopes outside the cave and they went away.

I just laughed at how my name had fooled the giants.

Polyphemus rolled the rock away from the door and now sat at the opening of the cave waiting to catch anyone with his hands.

All this while, I had been thinking of how to get out of the cave. And, this is what I did. I tied the sheep together in threes and tied one of my men under the middle sheep. The wool was thick on the sheep's bellies so each man could hang on to that wool and not be felt by the giant's hands.

The next morning as the Cyclops sat at the mouth of the cave, the sheep walked out.

Polyphemus laid his hands on each one's back as it passed.

"My good sheep," he said. "Why do you walk so slowly? Is it because you are sad for your master? Ah, if you could talk, you would tell me where Noman is hiding. Then I would tear him apart and eat him."

The last sheep went by him, and I was hanging on to the wool of its belly.

When that sheep had gone a little way from the cave, I let go of its wool and caught up with my men.

We raced back to our ship and set off.

When we were a good way out on the water, I shouted to the giant. "If anyone asks you again who set his mark on you, do not say it was Noman. That is not my name. Say it was Odysseus."

Adapted from: *Jamestown Heritage Readers, Book B.* Jamestown Publishers, Inc. 1991 and *The Iliad and the Odyssey: The Heroic Story of the Trojan War and the Fabulous Adventures of Odysseus.* Golden Press, 1956.

Facilitator Outline and Questions

"The Peach Boy"

1. What happened in this story?
2. Why do you think the little boy was delivered in a peach?
3. How would you describe Momotaro?
4. Why do you think that the old people wanted a child so badly? Do you think that some people feel that way today?
5. What demons do you have in your own life? (good vs. evil)
6. What roles do the animals play?
7. What power did the dumplings have? What other stories do you know of that use animals with human characteristics?
8. Momotaro makes a journey to slay the monsters. Many of us have taken journeys in our lives. Some call this a rite of passage or a ritual of change — something that represents a change that we may be going through in our own life. What are some journeys that you have make in your life? What are some rites of passage in our society? (e.g., graduation from high school, getting a driver's license, leaving your parents' house, a bar/bas mitzvah, birthdays, first communion or confirmation, wedding)
9. What would you do with the money if you were to capture a large treasure? What if you won the lottery or the Publisher's Clearinghouse sweepstakes?
10. What were your favorite parts of this story? Did you like the story? Why or why not?

"In the Cave of the One-Eyed Giant"

1. What happened in this story? How did Odysseus and his men get by the Cyclops?
2. What kind of person do you think Odysseus is?
3. Did you read the introduction? Did it help you understand the story better? How or how not?
4. Why do you think that we chose this story to go along with The Peach Boy?
5. Do you think this story really happened?
6. What do you think the story is trying to teach us?
7. Tell about a time when you have traveled or moved from one place to another and encountered difficulties. Did you have to outsmart these difficulties?
8. Do you think there are things that people today can learn from this story?
9. What are some things these two stories have in common? (Mention the oral

tradition which both of these stories come from.) How are these stories different? (Talk about the differences between the two heroes: Odysseus was very proud and egotistical; we imagine that Momotaro was more mystical and humble: he let his friends help him and let them be heroes, too.)

10. These stories are different from other stories we have read recently. Do you think that it is worthwhile to read these kind of stories? Why or why not? Why do you think these stories have survived all these years?

11/ Resources

About Books, Book Discussions and the Value of Stories

"Adult New Readers Get 'A Feel for Books'" by Sharon Morgenthaler in *The Journal of Reading*, Vol. 36, No. 7, April 1993.

Book Discussion Clubs for Adult New Readers. New Readers Press, 1988.

Book Discussions for Adults: A Leader's Guide. American Library Association, 1992.

The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination by Robert Coles. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989.

"Picture Books in the Adult Literacy Curriculum" by Peggy A. Sharp in *The Journal of Reading*, Vol. 35, No. 3, November 1991.

Vermont Reading Project, P.O. Box 441, Chester, VT 05143.
Telephone (802) 875-2751.

Books and Stories for Adult Developing Readers

We have listed here a number of anthologies, published primarily for adult developing readers. Individual titles, whether in the categories of easy reading for adults or young adults, children's literature, or adult fiction and nonfiction, are generally easily available but too numerous to list. Needless to say, the public library is one good place to start when researching books and stories for discussion. Reading levels were determined by the Gunning-Fog index.

Expressions: Stories and Poems (Contemporary Whole Language Series). Contemporary Books, 1992. A collection of 20 poems and short stories including selections by Maya Angelou, John Updike, Langston Hughes, Randall Jarrell and Toni Cade Bambara. All are thoughtful, lending themselves to personal application and group discussion. Teacher's Guide available. Reading level: 8+.

Goodman's Five-Star Stories. Jamestown Publishers, 1989, 1990, 1993.
This six-book anthology series consists of two books of "surprise ending" short stories

(Surprises, More Surprises), two of masterpieces of struggle and conflict (Conflicts, More Conflicts), and two of tales that take a sudden turn (Sudden Twists, More Twists). Including easily-recognizable authors such as Saki, O. Henry, Jack London, Mona Gardner, Shirley Jackson, Edgar Allan Poe, and Jesse Stuart, most of these stories make for good discusssion. With black and white illustrations. Reading level: 4-8.

Reading in the Content Areas, Literature I & 2. New Readers Press, 1990. Each of these books is an anthology of complete short stories, excerpts from novels, nonfiction articles, poetry and drama. All are adult oriented. Each unit is preceded by a general introduction to the selections following, with hints on how to enjoy that type of literature. Includes works by authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Mildred Taylor, Jean Kerr, Langston Hughes, Arthur Miller, O. Henry and Robert Frost. Illustrated with drawings, prints and photos. Reading level: 7+.

Scott Foresman Adult Reading: Comprehension. Glencoe, 1981. A 24-book comprehension series organized into four group themes, each with six books (A-F). The four themes are:

- People: how people deal with problems and issues in their lives.
- Messages: the art of and breakdowns in communication.
- Cultures: two sides of the American experience — acculturation and roots.
- Coping: the ways people cope with practical and emotional problems.

Includes poetry, songs, and plays as well as fiction and nonfiction selections. Reading level: 4-8.

Spotlight on Literature: Collections 1-8. American School Publishers — SRA School Group, 1988. An outstanding and delightful paperback literature series: short stories, poems and essays. These eight books are designed to acquaint readers with well-known classical and contemporary writers as well as to teach important literacy language and study skills. Each book's selections are organized by themes into three units. Includes writings by such authors as Guy de Maupassant, Saki, O. Henry, Leo Tolstoy, Emily Dickinson, Louisa May Alcott, Mark Twain, Chaucer, Ann Frank, Helen Keller and Jesse Stuart. The *Teacher's Guide* for this series includes summaries, questions, a glossary of literary terms and a checklist for reading literature. Reading level: 4-8.

Viewpoints: Nonfiction Selections (Contemporary Whole Language Series). Contemporary Books, 1992. The eight units in this anthology, each with three selections, focus on broad themes such as Great Moments, Family Relationships, Realizing Dreams, Letters and Verses About War. Questions for reflection/ discussion and writing conclude each unit. Although a few of the authors are well-known people or writers such as Bill Cosby, Christy Brown (of "My Left Foot" fame), Shirley Jackson and Martin Luther King, Jr., others are lesser known but equally powerful as writers or speakers and livers of life. A *Teacher's Guide* is available. Reading level: 8.

Words on the Page, the World in Your Hands: Books 1-3. Harper and Row, 1990. These three anthologies of original or adapted works — stories, memoirs, poems — by established writers, some well-known such as Alice Walker, Garrison Keillor and Denise Levertov, provide engaging and provocative literature written for adults. Book 1 offers selections with familiar concepts that can be understood at the literal level. Book 2 stresses the use of inferential reading skills. Book 3 is the longest and most complex of the series, with more abstract poetry than in previous books. A teaching manual is available and provides guidelines on reading elements to explore in poetry and short stories, selected lesson plans and brief notes on selections in Books 1-3. Reading level: 5-6+.

References

Abiyoyo retold by Pete Seeger. Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986.

"Appointment With Love" by S. Kishnor. From *Pursuits*, Scott, Foresman Publishing Company, 1984.

"Aunt Sue's Stories" by Langston Hughes from *The Dream Keeper*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1986.

"A Christmas Love Story" from *This Strange New Feeling* by Julius Lester. Scholastic, 1981.

"Dear Bill" from *The Wall: Images and Offerings for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.* Collins Publishers, 1987.

"Farewell to Black Hawk" from *Indian Oratory and Viewpoint* by W.C. Vanderwerth. University of Oklahoma Press, 1971.

"Buffalo Dust" by Carl Sandburg from *Early Noon*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1978.

"Flower Fed Buffaloes" by Vachel Lindsay from *Spotlight on Literature: Collection 8*. Random House, 1988. (Distributed by SRA School Group: American School Publishers).

"The Flowers" by Alice Walker from *In Love and Trouble*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973.

The Hundred Penny Box by Sharon Bell Mathis. Puffin Books, 1975.

The Hundred Penny Box, a dramatized recording (cassette). Random House School Division, 1977.

"The Ibo Landing Story" as told by Frankie and Doug Quimby from *Talk that Talk*. Simon and Schuster, 1989.

"In the Cave of the One-Eyed Giant," adapted from two sources: *Jamestown Heritage Readers, Book B*. Jamestown Publishers, Inc., 1991, and *The Iliad and the Odyssey: The Heroic Story of the Trojan War and the Fabulous Adventures of Odysseus*. Golden Press, 1956.

Langston Hughes: Poet of Harlem by Norita D. Larson. Creative Education, 1981.

"Letter from Major Sullivan Ballou" from *The Civil War: An Illustrated History*. American Documentaries, Inc. 1990. Video available.

"Letter from 2 Lt. Sharon A. Lane" from *Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam*. W.W. Norton Company, 1985.

Malcolm X: Black and Proud by Florence M. White. Garrard Publishing Company, 1975.

"The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant and "The Open Window" by Saki from *Spotlight on Literature: Collection 3*. Random House, 1988. (Distributed by SRA School Group: American School Publishers).

Peach Boy by William H. Hooks. Bantam, Doubleday Dell Publishing Company, 1992.

The People Could Fly by Virginia Hamilton. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1985.

Sarah, Plain and Tall by Patricia MacLachlan. Harper Trophy, Harper Collins Publishers, 1985. Video available.

"Stars" by Langston Hughes from *Selected Poems*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1959.

Stitched From the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Ante-Bellum South by Gladys-Marie Fry. Dutton Studio Books, 1990.

Tailypo retold by Jan Wahl. Henry Holt and Company, 1991.

Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold. Crown Publishers, 1991.

To Hell With Dying by Alice Walker. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, text 1973, illustrations, 1988.

"The Welcome Table" by Alice Walker from *In Love and Trouble*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973.

Wiley and the Hairy Man retold by Molly Bang. Aladdin Books, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1976.

12/ Appendixes

Sample Recruitment and Publicity Flyers

Reading Survey Form

Evaluation Sheet

Articles from *D.C. Literacy Newsletter*

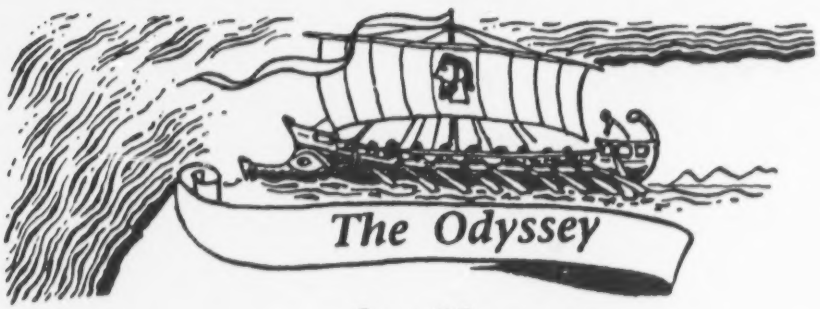
A Glossary of Terms Used in Literature

A Feel for Books:
February Discussion

Peach Boy
a favorite Japanese folktale

&

In the Cave of the One-Eyed Giant
from



by Homer

Day Session: February 2, Tuesday
10 a.m -12 noon
Room A-5
Martin Luther King Library
(9th & G Streets, N.W.)

Evening Session: February 2, Tuesday
6:00 -7:30
Meeting Room
Southeast Branch Library (7th & D Streets, S.E.)

For copies of the book please call 202/727-1616 or come to Room 426, Martin Luther King Library.

A FEEL FOR BOOKS
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

_If_ you like to read and discuss books,
_if_ you are a teacher or tutor of adult learners,
_if_ you like to tell stories, or
_if_ you want to be an adult literacy volunteer,
but can't make a long term commitment,
volunteer as a discussion leader for the D.C. Public Library's _lively_ book discussion series for adult learners.

Training session: May 8 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Cleveland Park Library
Connecticut Ave. & Macomb St. NW
{Cleveland Park Metro Stop - Red Line}

Learn how to work with adult developing readers & how to plan and lead a discussion session.

For more information, call the Adult Basic Education Office at the Martin Luther King Memorial Library,
Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., 202/727-1616.

A Feel for Books • Read More About It!

Ω • ß • Σ • π

If you liked reading *Peach Boy* and *In the Cave of the One-Eyed Giant*, you might like these, too.

Name/Title	Where to find it

Other related folktales and legends with magic, heroes, and journeys

Timeless Tales: Folktales & Myths	Folklore Section of the ABE Collection, Room 220, Row 80 Martin Luther King Library
Jamestown Heritage Readers	Same as above
Tales of Trickery	Same as above

Birds, coyotes, tortoises and rabbits are among the "tricky" heroes of these folktales from seven countries of the world.

Tales of Justice	Same as above

Tales of good guys outsmarting evil, dishonest, and cruel masters, kings or fellow citizens.

The Iliad and the Odyssey	Children's Division, Room 200 Martin Luther King Library

These two, very old and famous Greek stories tell of why the Trojan War happened and of Odysseus' long, long journey to get home after the war's end.

Incredible True Adventures	Nonfiction Section of the ABE Collection

Nine stories of real-life, unbelievable happenings; packed with adventure.

All the Way Back	Biography Section of the ABE Collection

The story of a modern day hero, Jim Brunotte. After losing both legs, an arm and an eye in Vietnam, he overcomes his handicaps with hope, hard work and humor.

A Feel for Books

Suggestions for 1993 – 94 Readings

Help us decide the type of readings to have during the 1993–94 *A Feel for Books* program. Show us the type of readings you like the best by checking (✓) any four (4) of the ones below. There is a space for you to add any other types if you want.

_____ **Adventure:** An exciting experience with lots of action

_____ **Biography:** The life or part of the life of someone interesting

_____ **Classic literature:** Good writing from the past which is still read and enjoyed

_____ **Current Events:** Something of social or historical importance that has happened lately

_____ **Historical Fiction:** The place and time are real, but the people or characters have been made up.

_____ **Issues:** Ideas that people have different values and opinions about

_____ **Letters or a Diary:** The thinking of someone told in informal, personal speech

_____ **Love and Romance:** The relationship between lovers

_____ **Mystery or Detective:** A puzzle to be solved. Who did it? Why?

_____ **Poetry:** Descriptions of feelings or happenings that are written in precise, rhythmic language

_____ **Relationships:** The bond among people who must depend on each other

_____ **Science Fiction or Fantasy:** Someone's view of living in a future time or in a make-believe time and place, where anything is possible

_____ **Travel:** Someone's trips from one interesting place to another

_____ **Westerns:** Readings about people, places, and happenings in the Old West

_____ Any other type you would like?

_____

A Feel for Books Rating Sheet

Date_____ Morning ❒ Evening ❒

Rate each topic: 1= poor 2=so, so 3=good 4=very good 5=excellent

You may also write a comment about any topic where it says, ***Also, I think . . . .***

RATINGS	Poor ⟶ Excellent				
1. The reading(s) talked about	1	2	3	4	5
Also, I think					
2. The ideas or topics talked about	1	2	3	4	5
Also, I think					
3. How the discussion was led	1	2	3	4	5
Also, I think					
4. How I felt about my speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Also, I think					
5. How I felt about hearing others speak	1	2	3	4	5
Also, I think					

6. The discussion could have been better if _____

_____

7. Because of this discussion, I _____

_____

8. Any other comments? _____

_____

D.C. Literacy Newsletter

News from and about D.C. Literacy Providers

D.C. Adult Literacy Network | Volume 5, Number 3 | June 1993

A Feel for Books: Abiyoyo & Tailleypo

Over sixty participants attended the April sessions of *A Feel for Books*. Both sessions were led by storyteller and librarian, Charlotte Smutko.

Students had the unique opportunity to hear Charlotte tell two folktales *Abiyoyo* and *Tailleypo*. *Abiyoyo*, originally a South African lullaby, was adapted some years ago by singer/storyteller Pete Seeger and published as a book in 1986. Father and son are banished to the edge of town for annoying the townspeople with their music and magic. Abiyoyo the Giant starts terrorizing the town, and father and son save the day with their magic and music, of course. Needless to say, they are welcomed once again into the community. Because the beautifully illustrated book contains the Abiyoyo song, Joe Hudson, one of the regular student participants, brought in his saxophone and played the tune during the morning session.

Tailleypo is a spooky, dramatic American folktale with bold, scary illustrations and themes of revenge, lying and pursuit. This tale, set in Tennessee, tells of the consequence of killing a creature with a great big, long tail. Because both *Tailleypo* and *Abiyoyo* are relatively straightforward, participants had time to pay particular attention to the creative illustrations. Much of the discussion focused on how the illustrator interprets the text of a story and records that interpretation in his or her art.

Participants acknowledged that we all have different perceptions and mental pictures of how a story plays out. One participant noticed that a photograph of a woman, hanging on the cabin wall in Tailleypo, kept changing as the story progressed. He interpreted the woman's ever-changing facial expressions as her increasing satisfaction at the main character's (a man) growing misery and terror. "Maybe he did her wrong," someone suggested, and hence, the revenge theme emerged. Both groups of participants also discussed illustrations as a means of discovering the time frame and kind of community in which a story takes place. ■

A Feel for Books: Special Fall Kick-off Scheduled

Lawanda Randall, storyteller extraordinaire and Training Coordinator for the Smithsonian, will share and discuss stories with adult developing readers on Saturday, September 18 from 10 a.m. to 12 noon at the Martin Luther King Memorial Library, Room A-5. Lawanda gets rave reviews from those who have heard her tell at the Museum of African Art or other storytelling events so *A Feel for Books* partcipants are in for a real treat as we kick off the 1993-94 year.

Stories scheduled for telling and discussion are:

- *What is Trouble?* and *Misery*
- *Late From School*
- *Two Kinds of Women*
- *Daddy*
- *The Story of Skunk And Why He Has Such a Bad Smell*
- *Summer Tragedy*

In addition to the storytelling and discussion, the morning event will feature a continental breakfast and a book-give-away. For more information, contact the ABE Office at 202/727-1616. ■

D.C. Literacy Newsletter

News from and about D.C. Literacy Providers

D.C. Adult Literacy Network | Volume 5, Number 1 | February 1993

A Feel for Books: Sarah, Plain & Tall

On December 10 approximately 15 morning and 19 evening participants ventured out in cold, snowy weather conditions to participate in a lively *A Feel for Books* discussion. *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan was the selection for the session. The book was a graceful story of a Kansas farm family at the turn of the century and the father's mail order request for a bride.

This session explored a part of the United States that had not been talked about before in the book discussion series. When asked if anyone from the group was from the Midwest, one woman volunteered that she was from Kansas, but she did not remember it being much like the story because she grew up in an urban area. The book's characters, including Sarah the "mail order bride" from Maine, Caleb and Anna, two motherless children in rural Kansas and their father Jacob, a farmer, were well-loved by *A Feel for Books* participants. They found the children endearing and especially admired little 6 year old Caleb's inquisitiveness and spunk. Some argued that mail order brides still exist and that some cultures still arrange marriages for economic and practical reasons. Evening participants got the chance to share what they would say about themselves were they to advertise for a spouse.

Some wondered about the author of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Did she model the characters after people in her own life? Was she "Sarah"? All agreed that it would be interesting to have a chance to speak personally with the author to hear her responses.

Work was the main part of life in those days. Most people had little time for leisure. Music seemed to be a way to bring spirit and entertainment to hard lives. Some noted that, as in other communities that have moved to a new land, music is a way to remain tied to a culture that has been left behind. One person noted that Sarah brought music with her, meaning she brought happiness and joy to the house.

The group watched a brief portion of the video *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. This helped everyone visualize what the Midwest plains looked like. Life seemed very lonely, with neighbors so far away. Some of the participants recalled their own farm life in the South, but it seemed that there were more people around and community wasn't quite so far away.

> ***"Did Mama sing every day?" Caleb asks his sister Anna. "Every single day, she answers. "Papa sang, too." Their mother died the day after Caleb was born. Their house on the prairie is quiet now, and Papa doesn't sing anymore.*** *–School Library Journal*

Students responded to *Sarah, Plain and Tall* because it told the story of a part of the American experience that this group hadn't talked about before. One of the evening participants seemed to sum up the mood of all the partcipants when she said, "I want to take it [the story] all and just hold it in my heart." ■

D.C. Literacy Newsletter

News from and about D.C. Literacy Providers

D.C. Adult Literacy Network | Volume 4, Number 6 | December 1992

A Feel for Books: Letters H❤me

The discussion of Letters H❤me (4 selections written during or about war) opened against the backdrop of the reading of Civil War Major Sullivan Ballou's poignant letter to his wife as dramatized in the recent TV series on the Civil War. Because all the readings were specific to the time period in which they were written or written about, the participants found it helpful to understand some of the historical events during these time periods–the Civil War, World War II and the Vietnam War.

Poetic was the favorite word used to describe the letter from Major Sullivan Ballou, a Union soldier. How did this letter make you feel? How do you think his wife felt when she read the letter, when she learned that Major Ballou had been killed? How did this letter get to us, and would a letter like this this be written today? What two loves was Sullivan Ballou writing about (love of country and love of family)? Were they in conflict? Why or why not? Ballou's language sounded *old* and *strange* to some, but its poetry was easily conveyed.

With the themes of love of country and family and the harsh reality of war established, participants at the October sessions of *A Feel for Books* went on to discuss *Appointment with Love*, a romantic, fictional short story with a twist set during World War II. A woman has been exchanging letters with a soldier but has refused to send a photo. Now they are about to meet at Grand Central Station. How appearance figures in relationships and the differences between men and women in relationships sparked a heated discussion among the evening participants, but everyone agreed that this was a really good story.

One morning participant shared that he related this story to his own experience of fighting in World War II and writing letters home to the woman he married right before being sent to the South Pacific. Most participants felt that this story would not have been as believable without the backdrop of war. Some found this piece easier to read than the nonfiction letters because it was less serious, there was an unexpected twist in the plot, and it ended happily (or so we guessed).

The last two letters, *Letter from 1 Lt. Sharon Lane* and *Dear Bill*, struck closest to home for most participants as both were vivid reminders of the tragedy and heartbreak of the Vietnam War. Unresolved grief, dying young, living with loss, and the meaning of the Wall (and by comparison the AIDS quilt), were all realities with which participants could readily identify. One daytime participant noted the sharp contrast, in both style and content, between Sullivan Ballou's letter and Sharon Lane's. Lane, a nurse in Vietnam, seemed to be surviving without conviction while Ballou passionately articulated his devotion to the Union cause. One man who served in Vietnam expressed his poignant and personal view of why this war was such a waste of so many young lives.

Near the discussion's end, one learner at the evening session shared that she now felt she should begin to deal with her grief over a close friend killed in Vietnam. At least two participants reported having visited the Vietnam Memorial after the discussion to find 1 Lt. Sharon Lane's name. It was there: Panel 23 West, Line 112. ■

D.C. Literacy Newsletter

News from and about D.C. Literacy Providers

D.C. Adult Literacy Network | Volume 4, Number 2 | April 1992

A Feel for Books

Over 90 students attended the March sessions r *A Feel for Books*. Morning sessions were led by rbara Price of Project CALL andMelanie Green of t. D.C. Public Library. Tony Kroll from PLAN led th evening session.

Students discussed two short stories by Alice Walker: "The Flowers" and "The Welcome Table." Both stories were intense and hard-hitting and both are contained in Walker's collection of short stories titled *In Love and In Trouble*. "The Flowers" is about Myop, a 10-year old girl who reaches the end of innocence when she stumbles upon the victim of a lynching. As she lays down her flowers at the corpse's feet she is changed, "awakened to questioning," as one student said. Though only three pages long the story goes through several shifts in mood. "The Welcome Table" is both deeply troubling and delightful as it tells the story of an old black woman on the verge of death who walks into a "cold" whites-only church. Thrown out into the cold she happens upon Jesus walking down the road. She spends her last hours happily talking and singing to him. The contrast between cruelty and hypocrisy and sheer love and goodness is extraordinary. Students discused motivations behind prejudice like fear and guilt. Many people were immediately reminded of Rosa Parks, a woman whose feet were tired like the old woman's and who also created a big stir by resisting discrimination. They talked about the author's image of Jesus as all-knowing and non-judgmental. They affirmed that the old woman had reached heaven while the church goers had a long way to go.

Before starting the discussion, Barbara Price talked briefly about Alice Walker and the theme which united all the stories in *In Love and In Trouble*–women bound together by their vulnerability, their ability to be wounded and hurt but yet survive.

The date for April's sessions has been changed to April 28 from 10:30 a.m.-12 noon in the Martin Luther King Library, Rooms A10 and A9 and from 6:30-8 p.m. at the Southeast Branch Library. The discussion will be from the book *Malcolm X: Black and Proud*. For copies or information please call Sharon Morgenthaler at 202/727-1616. ■

> *She broke the silence once more to tell Jesus how glad she was that he had come. How she had often looked at his picture hanging on her wall (she hoped he didn't know she had stolen it). And how she had never expected to see him down here in person. Jesus gave her one of his beautiful smiles, and they walked on. She did not know where they were going. Someplace wonderful, she suspected . . .*
>
> "The Welcome Table"
> by Alice Walker

D.C. Literacy Newsletter

News from and about D.C. Literacy Providers

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Langston Hughes A Big Hit

After reading Langston Hughes: Poet of Harlem for the November *A Feel for Books*, over 75 students and teachers met at noon on November 19 to talk about Langston Hughes' poetry and life. Excerpts from a videotape and an audio cassette added to students' understanding of Hughes as a simple and caring man, as well as an historian for African-Americans during a time in America when the Ku Klux Klan terrorized and Harlem swung. A special treat was guest Lillian Wesley, President of the Federation of Friends of the D.C. Public Library, who knew Langston Hughes and shared personal memories of discussions they had about his poems. For instance, Hughes once told her that the mother in the poem "Mother to Son" was a symbol for all Black women. Students admired Hughes because he wrote optimistically and honestly, yet in poems like "Border Line", could explore a heavy topic like the relationship between life and death. Hughes' ability to be tragi-comic, or make a person laugh and cry at the same time came forth in his poem, "The Ku Klux Klan." This poem also spurred a debate about the future hopes or despairs for the human race's ability to get along.

Twenty more students, teachers and tutors met that night at the Southeast Branch Library. Marcia Harrington, the facilitator, started by handing out maps of the U.S. to show where Langston Hughes was born, grew up, and lived until his death in 1967. This served as a jumping off place for discussion of his childhood, family life and artistic milieu. To questions about the influence of family members, the students were ready with astute observations about his father's bitterness, his mother's loving care, and his grandmother's contribution to Langston's early love of books.

What made Langston a poet? Students talked about genius, hard work, determination and encouragement as they pointed out that although Hughes was born with talent, he had to work at his writing, keep trying when hard luck came along, and have something to say. Reading some of the poems in the biography such as "Mother to Son," students fervently discussed Langston Hughes' feeling about race and racial hatred, comparing his loving, forgiving nature with his father's bitterness. Several students pointed out that not much information about the poet's personal life is included in Langston Hughes: Poet of Harlem. Marcia suggested they find some more complete biographies to fill in the gaps. The group concluded that Langston Hughes' great contribution to this world is his understanding of differences in and among people. It was pointed out that he went to school with many different nationalities and traveled extensively around the world. His love of Harlem was explored and wondered over.

Toward the end of the session the group read "Daybreak in Alabama," Hughes' image of a new way of life dawning in Alabama–a time when black, white, yellow and red clay hands would touch each other with kindness. At the end of the poem, there was an audible moment of silence and then a "Wow" from one of the students.

The session ended with each participant contributing a word to describe this powerful writer, and Langston emerged as a kind, touching, mysterious, lucky, loving, proud, creative, powerful, independent, straight talking, disciplined, gifted, confident genius. ■

A Short Glossary of Literary Terms

Nonfiction is literature that is based on fact or real life events.

Fiction is writing in which the writer creates characters, setting, and a plot.

Historical Fiction is writing about a real time in history. Some or all of the characters may be persons who really lived, but the writer uses his or her imagination to help create the characters' thoughts, words, feelings and the mood and setting.

Topic and Main Idea identify basic idea or points that the writer is trying to get across.

Supporting details give the reader information about the topic and main ideas.

The reader can get word meanings from context clues. **Context clues** are the sentences which come before and after the unknown or new word.

The writer's **point of view** is the way in which s/he looks at the subject or issue or relationship. In the *first-person* point of view, a character tells the story using the words *I* or *me*. In the *third-person* point of view, the author–acting as observer–tells the story using the words *he, she* or *they*.

Tone is the overall effect of the writing in a work of literature; for example, a *comedy* has a funny tone; a *tragedy* has a sad tone; a *mystery* has a suspenseful tone.

Ideas or events may be arranged in more than one **order** or **sequence**. The order that the writer chooses reflects his or her purpose. **Chronological order** is a time order. A **flashback** is an interruption in a story in which events that happened earlier are told.

Plot is the outline of events in a story (what happens).

The **narrator** is the person who tells the story.

The **setting** is where and when the story takes place.

The **theme** is the main idea or lesson of a story. Conflict or struggle is often important to a story. The plot of almost every story includes facing or dealing with a problem. The most common conflicts in literature are:

People against people;
People against themselves;
People against society; and
People against nature.

Figurative language is descriptive language; it is one way the author puts your imagination to work by creating mental images. Metaphors, similes and personification are examples of figurative language.

An **allusion** is a reference to some person, place, thing, or event that a reader is likely to recognize.

Irony is when something happens that is the opposite of what is expected. Writers often use irony to poke fun or to stress the sadness in a situation.

Purpose is the author' reason for writing the story.

A more complete glossary of literary terms which could be shared with learners is in the Teacher's Guide to the *Spotlight on Literature* series.

would like to read more
stories like the Hairy Man It is
the first book I have ever been able to
read all by myself. The illustrations are
very good. The large print is much
easier to understand.

To whom it may concern.
I would like to see this
Reading program to continue because
is means alot to me because
I made a lot of friend and read
a lot of good books too.

I like the Book discussions because I enjoy sharing my Opinion and ideas, and I also like being a part of a reading group. I like meeting new people. I like some of these books that I like to read are Wiley and the Hairy Man, The Hundred Penny Box, and To Kill a Mockingbird. I like Dejuan characters and what I like them. I hope this program is because I feel that students want to read more of it. I have been a lot of help to me. I hope we can continue the program because it means so much to me. I've learned a lot from all the books we've read in the program. A book I especially enjoyed was Wiley and the Hairy Man. I was able